SMALL DAYS WITH A SYNDICATE

by David Ashenden

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

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SEVENTY-FIFTH YEAR | FRIDAY, DECEMBER, 13th, 1957 | 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

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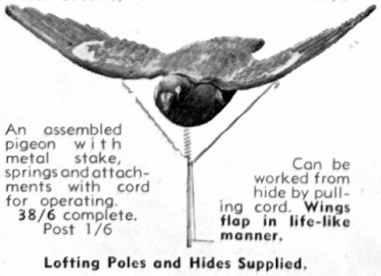

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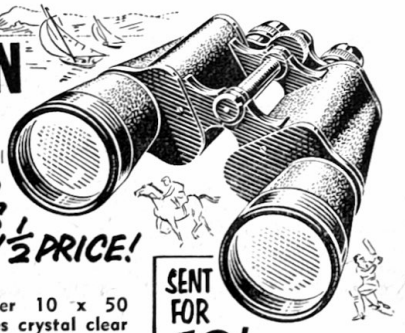

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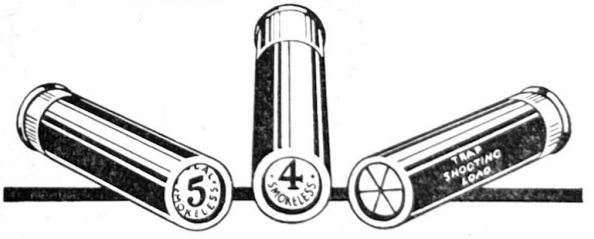

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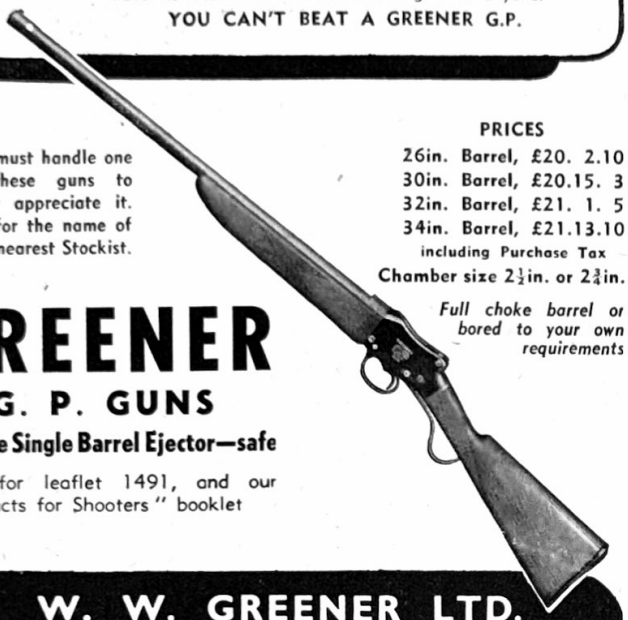

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GROUSE ENQUIRY

AMONG the many items of interest contained in The Nature Conservancy's 1957 Report, a review is given of some of the results so far achieved by those engaged on a study of the biology of the red grouse in Glenesk and on other moors.

Intensive work is being done on two areas, one of about 1,300 acres at 800 to 1,000ft. above sea level, and the other of about 300 acres at 1,600 to 1,700ft.

An essential part of the work is to provide an index of population changes throughout the period of the investigations. This is being tackled in two ways, (a) by marking grouse with plastic tabs so that individuals can readily be distinguished on the moor, and their movements and behaviour studied ; (b) by establishing a standard technique for counting grouse over constant areas, thereby determining changes in numbers.

Marking with tabs is only practicable when the grouse are full-grown. They can be caught in wire-netting traps on stubbles, or in nets on the heather. The latter technique has proved difficult and will probably be of limited value except for coveys during July and August. The only birds marked in 1956 were caught on stubbles around the low ground study areas. Grouse entered traps fairly readily in October and November and less readily up to and for a short period after Christmas. All grouse marked have also been ringed. The ring bears an address with which the finder may communicate. Different coloured plastics have been used for marking old and young cocks and for hens (yellow for old cocks, blue for young cocks, orange for hens).

A counting technique has been developed. It is liable to modification but appears satisfactory for showing major changes in numbers.

Despite the predominantly cool, wet summer, 1957 was a successful breeding season for red grouse in Glenesk and on neighbouring moors. Most nests hatched in late May and when the chicks were small the weather was fine and warm. Subsequently rain did little harm. The August density on two study areas was about 65-75 birds per 100 acres at 1,000ft. and at 1,700ft.

Adult mortality during the spring and summer was low, about 15 per cent on both study areas. There was in addition some movement on the higher ground. There was little disease. Most deaths occurred in the spring when losses were largely due to accident and predation ; the number of casualties decreased later when the birds became more secretive.

Eggs were laid early, the first nests hatching in mid-May. Clutches were large, averaging 7·8. Hatching success was high (94 per cent). There was evidence that eggs which failed to hatch were fertile.

Grouse on the low ground were fairly sedentary and it was possible to check the survival of the young. Coveys averaged 5·6 young on the low ground and 5·1 on the hill in early August. Including all birds, the young to old ratio was about two young to one old.

Study of the tabbed birds at 1,000ft. showed that there was very little movement between December and August. In the absence of severe weather it follows that the breeding density may be determined by the choice of habitat at pairing time in November-December. The requirements of grouse at this time need close study.

THE SHOOTING TIMES AND COUNTRY MAGAZINE

Incorporating FIELD SPORTS

Official Organ of THE WILDFOWLERS' ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

No. 3927 FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1957 Founded 1882

The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.—King George VI.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Decoying Demonstration

On November 22 a demonstration of pigeon-decoying was held in the grounds of Castle House, near Stafford. The meeting was organised by Mr. F. C. Sharp, the Regional Pests Officer, and Mr. C. J. Vickery, County Pests Officer for Staffordshire, and was attended by about 130 farmers and pigeon shooters. Among the audience (and one wonders whether he should not have been among the experts) was Mr. Hampton, who holds the present-day record of 479 pigeons shot in one day.

The meeting opened with a demonstration by Mr. H. E. Taylor, a well-known pigeon shot from Leicestershire, of the special camouflage suit that he uses when the building of a proper hide is not possible. The suit was described in detail in an earlier edition of *The Shooting Times*.

Mr. A. Barnes, of Staffordshire, who shoots with a 20-bore, wore an ex-Army sniper's suit with netting over the face, and showed how to erect a hide quickly by putting a few armfuls of bracken inside a circular, wire-netting "sandwich," placed around a lightweight framework of metal rods. He emphasised the importance of lofting a decoy up into the branches of a suitable tree, and demonstrated how this was done.

Major A. Coats explained that his equipment consisted of little more than a pair of secateurs, with which to build a quick hide (if bales were not available or desirable), about ten dead pigeon as decoys, a pair of binoculars (and an oil drum to sit on!).

The American Way

According to *The Daily Telegraph*, the American pheasant shooting season appears to have opened on a noisy and not altogether unexpected note. About 3,000 guns, we are told, lined up shoulder to shoulder in open country north of Los Angeles, when 800 birds were released. "It sounded," said a highway patrolman, "like a war starting." At least one gun was peppered about the face and announced that it was "unsafe out there."

Which reminds me of the story (true, more's the pity) told me by a recent visitor to the States who was one of the guests at a big shoot arranged in honour of a certain business tycoon.

Two lines of guns surrounded a small wood from the centre of which pheasants were released by "beaters" manning high platforms. The majority of the birds were ordinary ringnecks, a few were silver, and there were also some half a dozen "Irish" pheasants among the release.

The silvers, I was told, were very hard to see against the brilliant sunshine, compared with the ringnecks, and therefore the gun who brought one of the former to book was reckoned to be right on form.

The "Irish" birds were marked with a green ribbon on one leg. "What happens," I asked, "if you shoot one of these ?" The reply was simple and quite in accordance with what I have come to expect of this sort of American battue. "Then you are fined ten dollars."

Oh, brother !

Film of Proof

The 16mm. film with sound track, taken by Pathé for their News some six years ago, was shown at Leicester by Mr. W. H. (Bill) Smith, of the Midland Counties Rifle Club when he gave a lecture on the History of Firearms, on November 11. The film is only of some five minutes duration but may be of interest to Gun and Wildfowling Clubs. It may be borrowed, without charge, from the Birmingham Proof House, Banbury Street, Birmingham, 5.

Is this a Record ?

The good shots are always so well remembered, and how tired one sometimes gets of hearing about them. We are all naturally inclined to let our misses sink into discreet oblivion, although, if we are honest with ourselves, some of those more interesting bad shots —and bad shots can be interesting—may find their way into the private pages of the game book.

Last week I met a shooting man who has good reason to remember his misses and as far as I know probably holds the record for the least kills to cartridges fired at snipe. In twenty-two years, he claims, he has expended thousands of cartridges at these notoriously evasive longbills, and he has yet to hit one!

When eventually he ends this phenomenal run, I imagine that his pleasure will be tinged with no little regret at blotting his copybook of inaccuracy.

Stolen Shotgun

The following 12-bore was stolen at Sevenoaks, Kent, between October 23 and 28.

Serial No. 2211. Under and over type, "Harrison and Hussey" make. Has figure 1 in gold above and below barrels and above breech. Wrapped in green cloth.

If anyone can give any information which will lead to the recovery of this shotgun will he please get in touch with The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, New Scotland Yard, S.W.1.

AUCEPS.

Ugly, ungainly, wing-rattling, sand-sifters . . .

THE SPLASH

by Tower-Bird

ON the morning of November 23, I did not bother to go out with the gun until about 10.30. I had walked down to the edge of the marshes at sun-up, to find grass and rushes stiff and white with frost, and ice on the pools and ditches. By the time I eventually took up my musket and travelled to a certain marshy spot, the warmth of the sun had all but melted the frost, and snipe were feeding everywhere. One wisp of close on a hundred birds jumped from a drinking place, and I was tempted to shoot, but it was duck I was after, full or half, and I cursed the scores of snipe that rose with a *scaape, scaape* from the melting mud at the edges of drains and runnels I was stalking in the hope of finding the larger birds.

On the previous evening I had shot a couple of teal at a certain spot, leaving five others to zip away. To this spot I now made my way, feeling fit and confident, and knowing that I could not miss anything that rose. I had almost reached the edge of the rushy drain, with its centre of open water, when up got two teal — not rocketing skywards, but flying off like little mallard. But they flew off right into the glare of the sun, and, though screwing up my eyes and believing that I could kill them, I missed the bird I had chosen with both barrels.

Some minutes later, having sent Don to "roust" up anything from a pond dense with reeds, I was surprised by a single teal jumping from the very edge and rushing straight at me at waist-level. When a collision seemed quite possible, the bird turned off, offering an easy shot which I missed, but my second charge of shot, tearing up its smoke-trail as it flared, hit it to such good effect that it seemed to stop dead in mid-air, flung out its wings, and came spinning to the ground like the twisting seeds of a sycamore.

In the High Country

Having had a right roaring cold for several days, I now headed for the place of refreshment where I was to meet my fowling partner within half-an-hour, and, by the time he arrived my eyes were sparkling with Scotch — a drink, beverage, or tonic which I had not tasted for a year. We had another couple of doubles together, for he, too, had a cold, and then off we went to enjoy some successful walking-up of pheasants in high country, killing a brace apiece before having a "go" at the pigeon, which we thought would be plentiful, but which, in fact, had taken themselves off. We collected only four between us.

Finally, as the afternoon wore on, we left the upland shoot and made off to some distant marshes for evening flight, and it was there that we found The Splash. The Splash, in fact, was about the only bit of flood-water left on the whole wide acreage, except for the shining width of straight dykes and narrower drains. As we approached the place, we met an acquaintance who seemed to have the same idea as ourselves, but while we chatted, I gradually edged myself round him, and when he said that he was returning to the bank of the channel facing The Splash, I said that would be my spot, and walked off! My companion hid up some twenty-five yards below me in the fringe of tall grasses, and our acquaintance made off to the far end of The Splash, which was about four hundred yards long and very narrow, with no depth at all. I watched him get his decoys out and then sink out of sight. My partner had earlier suggested bringing our decoys, but I had assured him that there would be no water about!

Arrival of the Wigeon

And so we waited, expecting little else than teal and possibly a few mallard. At dusk a swirling mob of plover came flying backwards and forwards, calling wildly and settling round the edge of the water, then rising on restless wings to fly off elsewhere, before swishing back again from behind us. The *rasp* (and on one occasion I heard drumming) of countless snipe began to fill the air, and several times the barrels of my gun rose as the dark silhouette of what I thought to be a teal but which was a snipe came towards me against the dying orange and red of the west.

When the first of the teal *did* arrive, they swished past, turned beyond range, flew back and dropped with a splash, sending up tiny silver sprays of water. Mallard were now *quacking* loudly from the drains on various parts of the marsh, and then we heard their gossiping "upstairs." I saw a small party go over my companion, and his shot brought one down with a mighty thump. By this time, our friend "across the water" was getting fully into action, and now came the first whistle and chirruping of wigeon, and we saw small clouds of them passing over against the deep violet of the sky, too high yet for a shot. But soon the wigeon talk came closer and lower, and in next to no time scores of them were circling about the water, mixed up with mallard and teal, and then splashing down everywhere.

I saw two large shapes cross well within range, and managed to get in a quick, single shot and see the bird fall into The Splash. Don was out in a flash, leaping into and crossing the channel and dashing out to the bird, which was pricked in the wing and was making good headway over The Splash, half-swimming and half-flying. And even while this violent disturbance was going on, wigeon and mallard were dropping out in front of us on to the water.

This particular bird I shot chanced to be a female shoveler, a duck I dislike as a table "delicacy" (save the word!). That they are edible I will agree, but only just. If I had a shoveler in the larder and no other bird, I would eat the shoveler after certain preparations. But last year I had three hanging up and no other bird, and I ate all three at a meal, and now I care not if I never eat another. They are muddy with little real duck flavour. Alive, they may be beautiful to look at, but they are ugly, ungainly, wing-rattling mud-sifters, and I love them not, though no one could fail to admire the beauty of their plumage.

The Mad Minute

Thump, thump, thump went the gun of the fellow lying out in the darkness beyond us. We did not meet him again, but, if he did not collect twenty to thirty duck, he must have been shooting pretty badly. Had we been sitting over decoys, I do not know how many wigeon and mallard we might have bagged; as it was, we were content with a decent bundle of wigeon, and the mallard and the shoveler. But what a "mad minute" was that twenty last minutes of daylight. The sky fairly rained wigeon and teal, but there was no lack of the larger stuff, and all the time there were wigeon flocks passing overhead like pale shadows, while smaller lots were circling, diving and making runs-in before splashing down on the shallow water.

During the height of the fray, an incident occurred which prevented my shooting for ten minutes or so, just when matters were really hot. It is too long a story to relate here, and was just one of those things . . . .

And now comes the rub. One week later we returned to the same spot, bringing fifty cartridges each and carrying decoys. The Splash had all but vanished, and it looked as though there had been a heavy fall of snow over it. The snow, however, was the preening of swans, and some seventy to a hundred flew off when we first arrived—a long, long line of white beauty against the dark background of hills — beauty which I would rather see under the ground! It was a grand evening, but with very little backcloth of cloud, but we got out the decoys and hid up in excited anticipation.

Yet during the hour when evening turns to night, and in all those wide acres of marshland, with their long, straight channels and drains, shining under the half-moon, we neither saw nor heard any kind of duck, and only one snipe, though a few plover came wailing across the emptiness. *Not one single duck — mallard, wigeon or teal. Not one.* We discussed the matter and surmised that night, but even allowing imagination to play, to anyone acquainted with the area this *entire* absence of duck just does not make sense.

* * *

Note: the other day I shot four pigeon, at fairly lengthy intervals, all flying along the same line of flight. I had promised some to a friend who was away for the following three days, so, I opened the birds' crops to empty them. One contained wheat only; the second barley only; the third clover only; the fourth fifteen scarlet hips. They were all coming from the same direction and making for a common roost.

Small Days with a Syndicate

by David Ashenden

FOR the last few years we have been told repeatedly that the partridge as a game bird "is on the way out." It certainly looked as if the dismal prophets might well be right, and at best it would have a long, tough fight to re-establish itself in sufficient numbers to warrant a full programme of partridge days on the ordinary shoot. Nevertheless, in my part of the country it has made a remarkable recovery; wherever I have been invited to shoot good strong coveys have been in evidence.

Here, I must point out that my friends do not employ keepers—their shoots are made up of neighbouring farms, the owners of which form a little syndicate; or the shooting over several small farms is hired—and not always in one "block." As far as possible the game is managed—that is to say, a certain amount of vermin destruction is undertaken by the syndicate, and a few feed-stacks are placed strategically. Otherwise the game looks after itself.

And here are the partridges back in strength. Who would have thought we could shoot 19 brace of birds in one day where, last year, we only saw what we thought were a few barren pairs? In fact, we should have shot half as many again, but as so often happens with a section of guns doing the driving, many of the coveys "went the wrong way."

To give an example. From one 20 acre stubble we flushed 8 coveys, none of which went over the guns standing forward. Unfortunately, exactly the same thing happened on this ground the second time over. I think we must all admit that the system of guns driving to each other can never be so efficient for showing birds as a properly controlled line of beaters. There are a variety of reasons for this, but probably the main one is lack of organisation. This is in no way meant to be an indictment against the organisers of these very enjoyable little shoots, but it arises from the splitting of forces. Not all the guns are equally familiar with the ground.

Forward guns which are usually changed for each drive sometimes do not quite understand where they are to go. Placing the guns is at times a very exact science, and a few yards one way or the other may make all the difference. I have been sent forward with instructions which have proved to be vague, not being over-familiar with the ground. I have often heard the remark passed by the gun temporarily in charge of the forward guns: "I think this is where he means" — and often it isn't!

Study of Flight Lines

We must remember, too, that the organisers of these smaller shoots do not always have the detailed knowledge of the probable line flushed game will take. Their ordinary everyday life does not take them among game like a professional keeper who gets to know the vagaries of his charges. I have no doubt that in the case mentioned above, we "lost" our birds because no one in the party lived on the land over which we were shooting, and had not had the opportunity of studying the flight line of these particular coveys.

The expected line was over some parkland to a large field of roots on the opposite hill. The forward guns were lining a hedge at the bottom of the stubble with their backs to the roots. For some reason each covey when it was flushed swung left-handed over a belt of high trees on flank of the line — even though the left-hand flanking gun was well forward; and once clear of the trees they went right-handed across the park to the roots. If this beat is taken again this season, I have no doubt the lesson will have been learned, but next year the rotation of crops will probably have altered the beat altogether.

One further difficulty in the organisation of this type of shoot is that the gun in charge must always have his mind to some extent on the next objective. He must collect all the guns together after each beat so that they can be "swopped round," and one is tempted at times to take a beat in the direction you want to "go" rather than in the best direction for showing the game. This problem does not arise so acutely where a team of professional beaters can be collected in a vehicle and carted off to the next beat (possibly back over dead ground) while the guns walk or ride leisurely to their next stand.

Showing Pheasants

Much of what I have said about partridges applies to showing pheasants, but it never seems to me to be so difficult to keep them within bounds. It is true, of course, that in the class of shoot I am discussing one seldom has the chance of showing real sky-scrapers, and in any case one seldom has enough guns forward to warrant driving birds in this manner. More beaters in comparison with partridge driving are needed, especially where the cover is at all thick.

Generally, dog owners have to do this sort of beating so that the dogs can fill the gaps between the beaters, so to speak. This very often results in pheasants flushing in different directions because they are not marshalled forward as they are to the tap-tapping of a close line of beaters. More birds are apt to break back over the beating guns — and it is as well they do because, after all, the beating guns want their sport as well. In fact the "beaters" often have the cream of the sport, especially those accompanied by a useful dog.

Because of the comparative thinness of the beating line, many a wily old cock is hustled into the air by a hunting dog after he has run back through the line, and one can hear him cluttering off in the wrong direction. It often pays to leave a gun well behind the beaters to deal with these customers. At a recent shoot our host very sensibly left two guns at the rear of a long, narrow covert, and they accounted for six pheasants trying to go off the shoot to a neighbouring wood.

Result of Eight Barrels

Things do not always go as well as this! The week before I was sent forward with three other guns to line a sunken roadway facing a clover ley beyond which was a large field of kale being driven by the rest of the party. It was expected that any pheasants in the kale would make for the home covert behind us.

We had taken up our positions without showing ourselves at all. Long before the beating guns had breasted the hill below the kale 28 pheasants became airborne from the clover ley! They rose almost together, and all but six veered off to a much more distant wood on the flank. I am sorry to say the excitement of seeing so many birds in the air at once so unexpectedly put us off completely, and we were all guilty of "not knowing which bird to take first." One pheasant, a runner, fortunately picked up later, was the only result of eight barrels!

One can and should learn by one's failures, and I feel that perhaps this is one of the faults that everyone responsible for organising a shoot should keep well in mind. I think also that where the party has to be split into two for a beat it is essential to send someone with the forward guns who knows the ground thoroughly — even at the risk of a particular person doing less than his share of the walking.

A covey comes high and fast over the guns.

BIRD ACCIDENTS

by Henry Fletcher

MANY a shooting man, if asked to give particulars of some bird accident which he thought so unusual as to be worthy of record, might quite easily quote the case of a covey of partridges which had flown into some telegraph wires with disastrous results. I recall a day when I witnessed such an accident. We had lunched at a farmhouse, and were walking quietly down the lane from the farm, when a single partridge came up from behind, crashed into the telephone wires beside the road, and fell down dead.

When we see those black poles, so evenly spaced, we know quite well that there are wires stretching from one to the next; but it is scarcely reasonable to expect our feathered friends to understand this, and deem them rather wanting in intelligence if they fail to do so. I know a road in the West of Ireland, which bounds an extensive bog, and the natives say that dead snipe are quite often found upon it, which have collided with the telegraph wires that run alongside this road. If birds as agile as snipe, with all their capacity to twist and turn, cannot avoid these wires, it is not so surprising that other birds should fall victims to them.

Overhead wires cause many bird accidents, but here they are more of an obstruction to the gun.

In a somewhat similar way I have seen a cock pheasant, put up by the beaters, collide with the limb of a beech tree and fall dead in the wood. These casualties may be due not so much to lack of sense, or poor eyesight, as to the fact that a bird's eyes are set at the side of the head, like a hare's, and when trying to escape from something which has alarmed it, it may concentrate its attention too much behind it, where it thinks the danger lies, and too little in front, to note some unexpected obstacle in its path.

The Landscape That Isn't

Another type of accident which takes a regular toll of wild birds is due to the reflection of the natural surroundings of a house in one of the windows. Birds think that the landscape thus seen is real and strike the glass with such force that a broken neck is the usual result. I remember that when I was a boy such accidents were not at all uncommon at my old home, and amongst the ornaments of the nursery there was a stuffed cuckoo, which was said to have met its death in this fashion.

Barbed wire must also be a menace to birds, as it is at times to human beings. I have been told of the case of a bat which was found with a barb through one of its wings, and which had died either from starvation, or from its futile struggles to free itself.

Then there is the unfortunate accident, from the bird's point of view, when the gun aims at one bird and kills another, nearly always one following his intended victim. This is much more humiliating for the gun than when the chosen bird is accompanied by another, as must happen from time to time. Even so, I was rather overcome a short while ago, when three driven grouse fell to my one shot: and perhaps the more so, as they did not seem quite in line. I I was not unduly surprised therefore when one of them got up and flew back. The bird I intended to kill was gathered, but the third was never found, and I concluded that it had slipped away also.

Later on, I began to wonder whether they had ever been hit at all, or whether another explanation was possible, namely, that the shot passing just in front of these two birds had caused such a vacuum that for an instant there was no air to keep them airborne, and that they had fallen on the heather uninjured. After all, it is not uncommon for a second bird brought down in such a manner to get up and fly away a few minutes later

A few days after this three-for-one affair a rather remarkable incident took place on this same moor. A covey of grouse, flying towards the line, began to edge outwards, and the flanker, duly on the alert, waved his flag, and the covey turned inwards abruptly. As they did so, two birds collided and fell to the ground. Later on the flanker picked them up, both stone dead. It is unlikely that two grouse flying in the same direction, and bumping into each other, could have injured one another to any extent; it seems more probable that two wings clashed together, causing them to come crashing to earth when flying at 30 or 40 miles an hour, and that their necks were broken by the force of their impact with the ground.

Years ago, a friend of mine was on his way to a shoot, when all of a sudden a partridge flew across the road in front of the car, struck the windscreen, and fell dead on the highway. Thus there was a bird in the bag before the shoot started.

One of the most distressing accidents that overtake game birds, and are seen from time to time, occurs when a brood of young partridges tries to cross a tarmac road on a hot day and get stuck in the half-melted tar—a tragedy of the first water.

So far I have referred to bird accidents which have been witnessed by human beings, but all kinds of misfortunes overtake birds and wild life in general, which are never seen by human eyes. Perhaps the most extensive losses are caused by the various types of grass-cutting and reaping machines, which are in general use nowadays, and little can be done apparently to remedy this. Taking the country as a whole, the number of nests, eggs, sitting birds, and chicks destroyed annually must be tremendous.

I have before me, as I write, the thigh bone of an adult pheasant, which at some time had been broken, and then had knitted together again. The two halves are joined at an angle and overlap somewhat, but the bone is quite strong and serviceable. It came to me on a dinner plate, and I can vouch for the fact that the pheasant was in excellent condition when shot. One might speculate on the cause of the fracture: was it a shot or a mowing machine, and how did a bird so maimed escape its enemies while the bone slowly mended, and also, how did it feed itself meantime?

There must be hundreds of these avian accidents and tragedies which take place outside human ken; and if we knew more about them, might we not be surprised at the tenacity of nature, and its powers of recuperation, in circumstances which might well be considered hopeless?

Wildfowling Clubs

The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland: Hon. Secretary, Lt.-Commdr. J. W. Anderton, R.N.V.R., 19 Castle Street, Liverpool, 2.

On November 30 some eighty members of the Kent Wildfowlers' Association met at the Fox and Goose, Bapchild, to hear Major-General C. B. Wainwright speak on the duck ringing station which he runs at Abberton Reservoir, Essex.

David Ashenden took the chair and announced that our president, Mr. F. F. A. Burden, M.P. had hoped to be present to-night but he was unfortunately ill. The Club sent their best wishes to him for a speedy recovery.

General Wainwright held his audience enthralled for the next hour in giving a most forthright and amusing account of his work at Abberton. In a bad year he rings twice the number of duck of all the other ringers in Britain combined, and his total since he started eight years ago is now 16,400 duck. He described his traps and how they are worked. Duck are released in groups. A cock teal is the best decoy and the record catch in a 12ft. square trap so far is 80 teal. Some unusual recoveries include a teal and garganey from Turkey; a teal which was found with flight feathers missing in December 1953, was released in January 1954, when they had regrown. It was recovered in Sicily next June. There is an interesting summer movement across the North Sea; a gadwall ringed on July 12 this year was recovered in Denmark on August 15. Perhaps the two most unusual recoveries were a teal's ring, discovered in an eagle owl's nest in Norway, and a mallard's recovered from a "pork" pie in a London restaurant by a Harley Street specialist!

General Wainwright went on to discuss mortality rates and feeding habits. Teal he thought fed a good deal in day time, the other species at night. One fact he was quite unable to explain—one of his traps catches cock teal, whereas another trap 200 yards off catches only duck teal.

A large number of questions at the end testified as to how much the Club had enjoyed this outstanding talk. General Wainwright then presented the Burden Clay Pigeon Cup to Jeffery Harrison and the Guthrie Vermin Cup to D. G. Ward. The General said that if everyone who shoots game or wildfowl would shoot one head of vermin for each of the others, that would be the greatest contribution that anyone could make towards conservation.

After the meeting, all those interested in the Club's new wildfowl shoot, Nor Marsh, a 200 acre island on the Medway, gathered to discuss arrangements. Wardens were appointed to work under Bill Guthrie, who will be in charge. At the same time, three further members were trained in viscera extraction. Specimens sent in this season number 130 to date.

A group of reliable fowlers who shoot by the Solway.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

UNDER the heading "Danger on the Marshes" an anonymous journalist writing in one of our local papers utters a warning to foolhardy fowlers who risk their lives on the shores of the Solway, and suggests an unpalatable remedy for their frequent calls for assistance. The remedy, which I shall quote first, although it comes last in the column, is this: "One solution is to declare the whole area a nature preserve—which is what it ought to be."

A statement of this kind could only come from a person who has little interest in shooting, and another extract supports my surmise, namely: "A lot of amateur wildfowlers go to the marshes to kill the flighting geese and ducks either in search of sport, to provide meals, or just out of sheer blood lust. There's nothing to stop them. If they were equipped with a knowledge of the sandbanks and the fickle Solway tides, they would be safe enough, but no man even resident on the edge of the marshes has ever claimed to have that knowledge, and even experienced men have been cut off by the tides in the past. What chance, therefore, do these strangers—mostly from the North-east coast—have when they pit themselves against the Solway?"

But despite this expressed antipathy towards fowlers and fowling, I am prepared to agree with this unknown writer that a *small* number of geese and duck shooters are a nuisance to the people who live in the neighbourhood of the marshes where they operate. These sportsmen never bother to get reliable information about tides and mudflat topography, nor do they take the elementary precaution of mooring their boats securely, but they expect help as soon as they get into difficulties from helicopters and lifeboats. At times this help does not arrive, and they perish for their carelessness.

Luckier Than Usual

It would seem that the last three wildfowlers who got themselves cut off from safety by a rising tide on Sunday, October 20, were luckier than usual. While the water was above their middles a cockleshell boat was launched, but was beaten back by the wind. Then a helicopter, which happened to be in that area on official business, made an attempt to reach them, and succeeded. If the aircraft had not been there, these men would have been added to the victims of the treacherous Solway.

This sort of publicity does the sport of wildfowling no good whatever. Even the worst disaster here in recent years, in which four brave men lost their lives when they were searching the stormy firth for a fowler who was apparently at home, merely emphasised that the pursuit of geese and duck is a dangerous pastime. So those few fowlers who habitually wander about below the high tide level in a happy-go-lucky fashion ought to revise their ideas, otherwise they may find that they have helped the antis to create an unnecessary nature reserve, and at the same time deprived themselves and their mates of some of the limited free shooting left in this country.

Safety First Methods

It is, of course, quite possible for careful persons to be caught in a dangerous situation sometimes, and attempts have been made in this journal and elsewhere to devise some means whereby fowlers can either help themselves or secure help in good time. Inflatable jackets, lifebelts, coloured rockets, pre-arranged cartridge signals and so forth have been suggested, but so far the majority of fowlers pursue their quarry without any equipment or plan for dealing with alarming emergencies.

My own opinion is that an inflatable jacket or an inflatable lifebelt is an elementary necessity for fowlers who operate on notoriously dangerous marshes. Signals might also be extremely useful, if one could guarantee that someone would notice them and interpret them correctly, which is unlikely, unless knowledgeable fellow fowlers happened to be in the neighbourhood at the right time. The truth is that the average layman pays very little attention to shot combinations, or even to rockets of small size. Therefore, fowlers who have some practical means of saving themselves are in a better position that the others.

During severe weather, fowlers on inland marshes are also apt to encounter hazards which are difficult to guard against. A case in point occurred here about the beginning of the war, and the unfortunate man lost his life. According to report, a fowler went out one afternoon with his dog to shoot duck which were apparently forced to seek the open river, because Derwentwater was frozen over. However, several of the shot duck fell on the lake ice, and when the dog went to retrieve them, it broke through a thin patch. Presumably then (for the account of this tragedy is partly guesswork) the fowler went out to save his dog, and also landed in the water with fatal consequences to himself. Recently I spoke to a man who went across the ice to grabble for the drowned man. He described the position of the arms and legs, and suggested that the fowler must have hung quite a long time to the edge of the ice before he succumbed to the intense cold. One must assume that he shouted vociferously for a while; but although a farmhouse stands on a rise only two or three hundred yards away, no one heard him.

Best Sport in Bad Weather

The ordinary perils of wildfowling are also increased by the fact that sport is likely to be good when weather conditions are at their worst. Blizzards and thick fog confuse wildfowl and often bring them within range of shooters who are not otherwise hidden; but these conditions can just as easily confuse the fowlers. Therefore, despite the excitement of the chase, one must remain always alert for signs of danger. Apart from the possibility of a fatal termination, every time that fowlers are marooned by the tide their stock falls with the general public. Eventually they may be regarded as irresponsible half-wits, and (as I have already said) this is precisely the atmosphere which will favour the anto-sport brigade, if they decide to press for another nature reserve.

One must admit, however, that wildfowlers are not the only people who are frequently calling for help. Rock climbers are equally guilty in this respect. They persist in scaling, or in trying to scale, the most formidable crags, and a percentage much higher than that of the wildfowlers, regularly come to grief. In fact, the casualty list is so inevitable that several mountain rescue teams exist in the Lake District alone. As far as I know, they receive no pay for this service.

On the Saturday after those three duck shooters were taken in the nick of time from the rising waters of the Solway an unfortunate man aged 27 fell from Dow Crag, Coniston. He was checked 10 feet from the bottom by the climbing rope, but that did not save him from serious injuries, which caused his death the following day in hospital. I heard that the rescue was performed in appalling conditions. The weather was foul, darkness had fallen, and the way to the crag foot lay over jagged rocks. One of the team was reputed to say that he had never taken part in such a difficult rescue.

Years ago I was told of a police sergeant who never got over the effects of a mountain rescue in the cold, wet, and darkness. In a state of exhaution he had helped to carry a stretcher down a rough mountainside, and through a river. This effort left him with an illness, which ultimately finished him.

But the rock climbers are, in one respect, in a better position that the wildfowlers. They can turn out platoons of rescuers when their sport goes wrong without arousing the enmity of busybodies, and I have, in fact, never heard anyone say that rock climbers are a nuisance to the inhabitants of hilly districts and that their sport ought to be made illegal. I have, however, read in the remote past that a system of rocket signalling should be devised to get help to injured climbers more quickly. Nothing ever came of this suggestion, probably because rockets would seldom be seen by potential rescuers in thinly populated valleys. One advantage held by climbers is that they operate in little groups, and someone is, therefore, able to get assistance in an emergency.

Pheasants flushed from this strip of kale would be unlikely to offer high or difficult shots.

The Young Shot

Pheasant Trifles

by Petrel

AS every rough shooter knows, game shooting nowadays is hard to come by, and costs more than most of us can afford. The few pheasants and partridges that feature in the average gamebook represent many hours of pleading and cajoling by the diarist or the generous invitations of his friends, for it is seldom on his own rough lot that he can devote his whole attention to these birds and be certain of putting something in the bag. It came as a welcome surprise, therefore, to receive two phone calls within a week to "do something about all these pheasants" from farmers whose larders were empty and who for one reason and another were unable themselves to take advantage of this season's bumper game crop. Answering the first call, I was reminded that the pheasant only becomes a really sporting proposition when it is driven and shown in the grander manner, for walked-up in open country it offers a mediocre shot, although I am not above missing the climbing bird that gets up under my nose. With a couple of dogs to find and flush, and the birds concentrated in a strip of short kale measuring perhaps 100 yards by 20, I excused the massacre to come with the thought that this was strictly a pot-hunt, set myself a limit of four cock birds—hens to be spared—and went into action. I might have known better.

Ganging Agley

An obvious veteran on the *qui vive* out in the meadow beyond the kale, which disappeared apparently into thin air, but more likely to the wood at the foot of the slope dictated the plan. Walking towards the wood, we should drive all before us along the ground to its sanctuary, but by working a flanker and coming uphill from the trees, we were bound to flush the birds, most of which, surely would break back for the woodland. I might even get a sporting shot! True there were some hazards; the Guernseys close on the right flank and the cottages directly ahead, but anything breaking left could expect short shrift. How many birds the kale harboured remained a mystery, though three more cocks had made a running exit into the wood by the time I reached my starting point.

Twenty minutes later I had failed by one cock bird to reach my limit, and the kale was empty. Four times the dogs and I had combed it and put out nigh on a score of pheasants, which only goes to show that:

a. Scent on this dank, muggy morning was negligible.

b. Pheasants, especially the hens, will sit "main tight" in very little cover, and must surely possess some powers of reasoning or why else do they get up so often behind the gun and fly chest high straight for cattle and cottage windows?

c. The easier the shot and the more time I think I have, the more likely am I to miss.

Gone Aloft

Most of the birds in that little field, incidentally, were cocks, which may or may not be significant. It is certainly not sufficient evidence on which to judge that this is a cock year as some are tempted to do on such local information. When two of us answered the second invitation a few days later, the majority count was in favour of hen birds, which turned out to be most unfortunate, seeing that after shooting three of each sex, we made it "cocks only" and thereafter saw but one more cock amongst a multitude of hens.

And a crafty bird was that one. We came upon him in a clump of trees beside the road. In went the dog, came what sounded suspiciously like a scuffle and I thought to myself, there's a swift bitch. But the suppressed *cock-'ock* increased in volume and confidence, and a flapping among the branches of the hollies proclaimed that the bird had gone aloft. But in which holly, for there were three of them?

We threw sticks, we bombarded with stones, and in desperate annoyance I fired a shot among the branches. Nothing moved. Stand you on the corner I bade my companion, while I go and shake the tree. He stood and I shook, but my choice of tree was wrong. Out of the left-hand holly burst the cock and an ominous pause was followed by a frantic shot. (Strange how some shots *sound* hopeless). "Get him?" I asked. "No," came the sorry reply, "As a matter of fact I thought you were wrong and that he had already gone, so I was caught on the hop." "You can be forgiven for that," I retorted, "but you might have more faith in Janet. She's been acting like a coon hound. Come to think of it, I wonder why more pheasants do not take to the trees in the face of a questing dog instead of breaking cover. A yellow hound, especially, must look uncommon like a fox, which is guaranteed to put pheasants among the branches.

A bird in a tree presents a bit of a problem if it defies all efforts to make it shift. One can hardly shoot it where it sits, and a really stubborn squatter deserves, surely to be by-passed.

A Bit Too Close

The treatment of a bird in such circumstances depends on the company, its principles and the needs of the moment. Regard our party as it forces its way through a Yorkshire woodland. *Cock-'ock, whirr, rattle, bang,* a muffled oath and the line comes to a halt. Six pairs of eyes peer upwards and focus on the centre of attraction which sits hiccuping defiantly in the top of a sycamore. Much tapping on the trunk fails to dislodge the bird. "Fire a shot across his bows," orders the Colonel. His adjutant ups with his 20-bore and obliges. The cock never blinks, but tightens its hold on the bough. "Again," comes the command, and it is executed with similar results. "Once more," splutters the C.O., "nearer." The third shot is too much for the pheasant which tumbles, killed instantly, from its perch.

"Not that close," bellows the colonel with a heavy show of indignation, but the fell deed is justified when we see the length of the old bird's spurs. I have often wondered how long that cock would have sat there in the face of our disturbance.

Another treed pheasant led us a pretty dance last Saturday. This time it was a hen that my companion hit in the undercarriage with his first barrel, and which made away in wavering flight like a model aeroplane whose engine is fast running down, for a clump of trees at the end of the clover field. I thought it would drop into the thick cover of the undergrowing brambles, but instead, it made a supreme effort to gain height and lit on the limb of a beech. Whereupon we committed a tactical error by both approaching from the same side of the clump and the hen planed away from her perch straight above the spot where I should have been standing to block the line of escape. When we hurried round the cover there was no sign of the bird, and though we hunted diligently with the three dogs which took a line across to some distant firs, we drew blank.

Later in the afternoon, my partner, reasoning that a bird hit in the legs was unlikely to be much of a runner, and would more probably seek the heights whence it could make an easier take-off, went back to the firs and looked up instead of down. He found his hen hanging on somehow to an outside branch, and shot it before it flew off again. There was no doubt that it was the same bird, for both its legs were broken.

You may wonder why he did not fire his second barrel in the first place. The answer is that he has a habit of gripping his gunstock with the right thumb extended across the wood behind the safety catch (which, incidentally, is a long one). Sometimes with the recoil movement, the safety snags his thumb and thus goes "on." This was one of those times.

AN EXILE IN CYPRUS

by Michael Shephard

AS the small plane swept down towards the shining surface of the great lake, towards the gleaming full sails of the feluccas, wide acres of dark shadow came to life and colour. A great concourse of wildfowl, disturbed by the roar of the engine and the hawk-like shape stooping on them, had risen from the water and the tawny sand flats.

Flying in front of us, as my pilot throttled back to the low stalling speed of an Auster were great packs of duck while other parties broke away to right and to left, circled back behind us and settled to rest again. Black clouds of birds bigger than the others resolved themselves into wavering lines and faded gradually towards the westering sun.

Darkness comes swiftly over Lake Manzala and, as two small warning puffs of anti-aircraft fire warned us that the Egyptian line was not far off, the Auster swung back on its course and headed homewards for Gamal airfield. A fast flying bunch of egrets turned away from us and caught the roseate blush of sunset.

As we taxied slowly towards the control tower it came back to me, a picture of other days of similar circumstances when I watched a vast gathering of fowl on the salt lakes of Porta Largos, in Thrace ; but never did I see so many duck as I had seen that afternoon. It was impossible to make any sort of a count.

So one season passed without a shot being fired from my gun ; now another begins with little promise of sport despite the prevalence of game about me, because no guns or cartridges are allowed, save those reserved for grimmer purposes.

Actually, it is this very restriction which has led to the compulsory preservation of game at a time when stocks were dangerously low as a result of shooting so widespread as to justify the title of Cyprus' national sport.

Short Shrift

The sporting birds included partridges (chukor), quail, snipe, duck, geese, pigeon and doves and strict seasons were laid down just as today there are seasons for the harvesting of carobs, olives, oranges, grapefruit and lemons. Some of these seasons were short indeed, but with such a concentration of guns varying from the most ancient muzzle-loaders to the most modern over-and-unders, well-trained dogs and enthusiastic shooters (the term sportsmen cannot be used here as a general term), game birds and hares had short shrift.

To these were added those wretched victims of both light shot and bird-lime—the song birds and the beautiful.

Today, after two full years of protection, stocks of indigenous game have increased to such a degree that they must almost have reached the limit of natural balance. The migrants arrive, rest and pass on unmolested. Only bird-lime and traps still take their toll. For instance, recently in one market over two hundred bee-eaters were being offered for sale for food and many a rare passer-by falls victim to the limed boughs intended for the humble sparrow.

Swimming from the long, sun-baked golden beaches as the heat of autumn has its last fling I feel that same feeling that I knew on other beaches at home, watching the small waders flying untidily, restless, from one point to another, settling and running, probing and preening, only to fly on as their place was taken by another band. At home, all this together with the whisper of wings as the wild duck fly across the coast towards the stubbles, would make me think of the winter to come and the sport to come with it.

The Autumn Migration

Here, in Cyprus, the stubbles were ploughed in almost before the summer began and there is little to attract duck until the rains turn the island green again, the rivers flow and the water builds up over the now dry and glittering salt pans.

Then, and not before, will we put snipe out of the marshes and watch the duck and geese mingled strangely with the softly flamboyant beauty of a thousand flamingoes. But, however different it may be to all that I have known, the autumn is here and the migration begins. From time to time a large flight of herons passes over the town or a flock of egrets, the swallows and swifts return, having already nested here and passed on again. They remain for a few weeks and continue south. Other small migrants stay a few days before carrying on with their journey, followed by an attendant body of hawks. It is the season of the year.

So far as I have noticed them, the birds of prey here fluctuate as do the migrants, but that may well be the result of fast changing conditions—weeks of fertile vegetation replaced by months of barren desert in the plains—resulting in a shift of habitat demanded by the natural food supply. In the high mountains one can always find the eagles and around the villages vultures wheel at the time when sheep and goats are slaughtered, while under the rocky crags of the cliffs falcons are constantly seen. Kestrels hover over those patches of cultivation or scrub which can conceal the smaller mammals in the midst of dry, brown, dusty acres. But for days on end I have driven along one road and, during the spring, I counted dozens of small hawks which, however, I could not identify—they were about the size of merlins. Then, suddenly, they were no longer there and will not return, I imagine, until a change repopulates that area with beetles, locusts, grasshoppers and other insects which probably form the chief part of their diet.

Reminders of Home

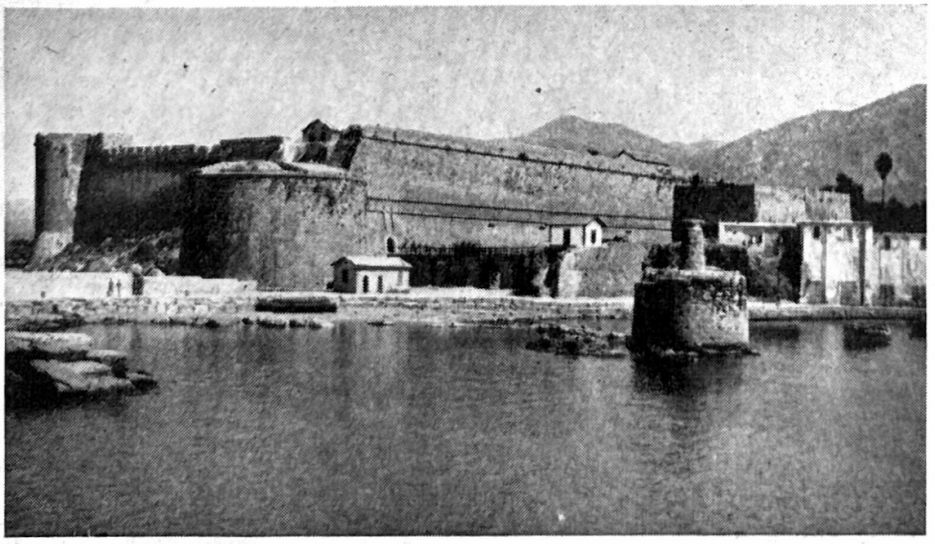
However, there are other birds which thrive in this sanctuary and which remind me of an ungamekeepered England — magpies, hoodie and carrion crows, rooks, jackdaws and little owls. And insects, too. I have seen swallow-tails and little hummingbird hawkmoths, death's head hawks and oleander hawks, painted ladies and clouded yellows, as well as others common to the African continent.

In the sea, also, are fish which take me back to British coasts—rock wrasse to remind me of Cornish holidays, big grey mullet to take me back to Southern piers and harbours, big sand sharks or dogfish and huge rays and, further to sea, tunny or tuna. The Cyprus harbours, as well, are like those of the little fishing villages of the south-west, with their fisherfolk much the same.

Evening is coming on as I write this and I have just climbed to the flat roof from which I can look down on the harbour and across towards the mountains of Turkey. To my right one of the squat towers of the ancient Venetian castles is surmounted by the Union Jack, below which a single khaki-clad sentry stands by a bren gun. In the harbour brown bodies are swimming or lounging on the sand, while white sails of yachts stand clear against the calm blue of a Mediterranean at peace.

A fishing boat cuts a clear wedge-like wake and beyond it another wedge moves darkly above the calm. It leaves no wake—a wedge of wigeon moving with the oncoming dusk.

Finally, night will come and with it the brilliance of the full moon under which I may again hear the wild call of migrating geese, as I heard them last night. As I heard them in a different place—so many places—under different conditions, it seems, so long ago.



Kyrenia Castle stands sentinel over the bay.

Forthcoming Field Trials

SECRETARIES OF FIELD TRIAL SOCIETIES ARE INVITED TO SEND US REPORTS OF THEIR TRIALS FOR PUBLICATION IN "THE SHOOTING TIMES." REPORTS SHOULD BE SENT DIRECT TO THE KENNEL EDITOR, MR. P. R. A. MOXON, HERNE COMMON, HERNE BAY, KENT.

Dec. 16 & 17 : Midland Counties Field Trial Society (Spaniels). Milton Park, Peterborough, Northants. Judges : Mr. Hal Jackson and Mr. D. C. Hannah. Secretary : Major H. Peacock, The Ferry, Milton, Peterborough.

Jan. 1 & 2, 1958 : English Springer Spaniel Club. Shadwell, Thetford, Norfolk. Judges : Mr. J. Lukies and Mr. J. MacQueen, jun. Secretary : Miss D. Morland Hooper, 3 Eastfield Road, Royston, Herts.

Jan. 4, 1958 : Cambridgeshire Field Trial Society (Retrievers) (Puppy and Non-Winners Stake). Gorhambury, St. Albans. Secretary : Mrs. M. J. Curtis, The Moors, Whittlesford, Cambs.

Jan. 9 & 10 : Spaniel Championship. Presaddfed, Bodedern, Holyhead, Anglesey. Judges : Mr. Andrew Wylie and Mr. R. Hill. Secretary : E. Holland Buckley, The Kennel Club, 1-4 Clarges Street, Piccadilly, London, W.1.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters and photographs are invited for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published. Correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. 'Phone: HYDe Park 2556/2557.

RAILS AND QUAILS

Sir,—It is always a pleasure to read "Sea-Pie." His article "Rails and Quails" reminds us that we shall shortly be enjoying our annual shooting holiday in Co. Cork where we see plenty of water-rails, but few land-rails.

However, in the hope that my early years were not altogether wasted, surely the quotation is more like "*O tempora, o mores*" and was said by Cicero who made a notable speech the gist of which was "Times isn't what they was."

J. A. R. HELPS,
Binfield, Berks.

BILL FOR BARBARISM

Sir,—Lord Dynevor has just introduced a Bill into the Lords which will make it legal to spread myxomatosis. That means ten days of lingering agony and slow death for practically every rabbit in the country. It is a Bill for Barbarism. It is indefensible and a disgrace to our national sense of decency.

Lord Dynevor's Bill seeks to repeal the clause in the Pests Act, 1954, which made it illegal to spread this foul disease. That clause was supported by all three political parties and was cheered loudly in the Commons. A quarter of a million people signed a petition to the Queen in support of it.

Yet Lord Dynevor's Bill was "greeted with applause from the Conservative benches" in the Lords. Why?

His new Bill will make it illegal to sell rabbit meat or rabbit skins. That is a blow at cheap meat, since rabbits keep down the price of butchers' meat. It also means trebling the price of felt and bowler hats, fur gloves, cheap furs and other rabbit by-products. In short, it will hit the working classes in the pantry, in the pocket, on the hands, on the back and on the head.

This monstrous Bill, drafted to satisfy a few greedy farmers, who are too lazy to catch rabbits, or too mean to allow their workers to do so, must be thrown out of the Commons neck and crop. I hope readers will write to their M.P.s about it.

A storm of indignation was launched against the Russians because of Laika, the space-dog. This Bill will inflict far worse suffering not on one animal, but on tens of thousands. What is the R.S.P.C.A. doing about it?

J. WENTWORTH DAY,
Ingatestone, Essex.

BILL POWELL—R.S.V.P.

Sir,—Your correspondent R.S.W.-L. (Cambridge), whose letter under the above heading appeared in the issue for November 15, is evidently unacquainted with Solway "sportsmen." Perhaps just one of my observations would serve to clarify.

One December morning, I was parking my car before "attending the dawn chorus," when the peaceful scene was shattered by a fleet of six cars dashing wildly up the coast road, bumper to bumper, with an urgency one would associate with an armoured car raid through the enemy's lines.

The dawn flight was typical of a quiet, crystal-clear morning, and no-one fired a shot. I was about to arise from my shallow pit near the water's edge when I perceived a skein of about fifty pinkfeet coming straight to me. They came directly over at about seventy yards, and, not wanting to maim them, I let them go without so much as raising the gun.

They flew parallel to the shore, rising steadily, and, when mere specks in the blue at about two miles distance, they turned to cross the shoreline at a great height, to be greeted by one of the sharpest outbursts of firing I have heard in a lifetime of sport. Nothing fell, of course, but then no party can be expected to bring down birds from a height of four hundred yards. But no doubt the party would have the satisfaction of knowing that one or more of those fine graceful birds may have received a letter shot wound in the abdomen.

EX-WILDFOWLER,
Manchester.

Mr. A. Barnes of Staffordshire demonstrating how he lofts a pigeon decoy with telescopic rods. See "Notes and Comments" on page 991.

THE .410

Sir,—As a regular reader of *The Shooting Times*, I always real with interest "Petrel's" articles, but in the November 8 issue I thought that he was praising the .410 rather more than it is worth. I have a s.b. .410 which is the perfect gun for the person who shoots for pleasure, as I do.

My uncle, Col. P. E. Brown, who did a great deal of shooting in India, advised me to start off with a .410. I accepted his advice and am grateful for it. He often used to say, when shooting geese, "Don't aim at the hay cart, aim at the tractor." This is no ill advice. A goose's head is about the same size as the vital part of a pigeon. I have shot pigeon at nearly 40 yards and killed them with a 2¼in. .410. Some will say that the skull of a goose would be impossible to penetrate at this range; possibly so, but I doubt it, even with No. 7s. Either way there is such a thing as concussion and even geese get it.

It is my advice to the beginner to start off with a .410. If he does, I guarantee that when he changes over to a 12-bore, his bag will be much greater for it. His woodcraft and fieldcraft will be improved to such an extent that he will surprise himself.

C. H. BURNS-JONES,
Wolverhampton.

GUN OIL AND CLEANING

Sir,—I have read with interest the notes and letters which have appeared recently, including those of "North Country," on this subject and have waited for an article which would tell us the reasons for various oils and methods of cleaning our guns. As no such information has been forthcoming, I venture to put forward my own views on the subject.

Combined with cleaning a gun there are three further processes involved:

1. Corrosion prevention.

2. The application of a barrier film to give temporary protection from rust. (A permanent barrier such as paint is considered unsuitable.)

3. Lubrication.

Corrosion prevention applies to the bores of barrels and to a small extent to the outside of a gun through contact with acid sprayed root crops, sweaty hands and sometimes a corrosive atmosphere. Articles and correspondence in this journal show that the protection of bores is well understood and if it is not possible to eliminate the corrosive element from the products of combustion then it must be removed as soon as possible after firing, either by dissolving out with water or neutralising with an alkali which is compounded with gun cleaning oils. It is when we come to protection from rust and lubrication that mixed thinking appears to take place; oil is a lubricant, but the term "to oil a gun" is used as a rule to mean to apply an anti-rust compound.

Now for rusting to occur it is necessary for oxygen (air) and water to be present; water from the atmosphere of course contains dissolved air so that rusting can take place under water. There are two ways of preventing rust on guns; the first is to coat the metal with a film of water soluble oil so that any water present is emulsified with the oil and water when present in excess shows up in

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the form of the familiar white streaks; the second way is to remove the water by thoroughly wiping out, drying and then protecting the surface by applying an oil which has water resistant properties such as a straight mineral oil or a petroleum jelly. The low and medium carbon steels usually used for gun making are prone to rusting. The degree of rusting can be reduced by the addition of one or more elements and the high chrome alloy steels are virtually rustless. A good surface finish also reduces rust proneness.

Here I must digress and explain that all animal and vegetable oils have to a degree water soluble properties, so that when previous generations protected their guns with olive oil, tallow or suet they were, without realising it, using the best possible treatment available. Until about 1940 most mineral oils were blended with a vegetable oil such as Palmoil which gave the resultant product some anti-rust properties; these combined lubricants and anti-rusts deteriorated when exposed to air which caused them to harden, lose their lubrication properties and in time to become acid and cause mild corrosion. Modern straight mineral oils have been developed which retain their lubrication properties almost indefinitely, but they have no water emulsifier properties, in fact some of these oils are specifically designed to reject water.

To return to gun cleaning, the use of soluble oil (such as Young's .303 which is also an acid neutraliser) is a very safe and satisfactory way of stopping a gun corroding or rusting after use. The oil penetrates into crevices which cannot be wiped out and effectively emulsifies any water present, in fact the treatment is so safe that I believe that if barrels are just swabbed out with a generous supply of .303 there is no need for any further cleaning from the point of view of protection (this is just for the lazy gun cleaner, I am not advocating it).

There are two points against this treatment. First, the oil has such marked emulsification properties that it is easily soluble in water, so that if the oily gun is exposed to wet the oil is soon washed off and the rust protection is lost; Secondly, the oil tends to oxidise when in contact with air and go hard, so oil that enters the action and locks in time, clogs them up. The tendency of soluble oil to lose its properties by contact with excessive moisture is in part counteracted by the fact that the barrel bores can carry a heavy film of oil which does not get wiped off and that, in time, the felt of the gun case gets saturated with surplus oil so that the outside of the barrels are protected against damp except when this is excessive.

The alternative method is to clean and dry out the gun and then treat with an oil which has good penetrating and water resistant properties. The advantage of this method is that rusting is resisted so long as a mechanical film of oil is maintained on the steel; this type of oil can also be provided to act as a lubricant, an alkali can be introduced and in fact it becomes an all purpose oil as its name "3-in-one" signifies. If the gun is being stored for a long time then a protective film with more mechanical strength such as petroleum jelly needs to be applied. The emphasis on this second method of protection is that the steel must be moisture free before the application of the oil, otherwise a limited amount of rusting will take place under the oil.

To sum up therefore, for a quick safe clean the soluble oil process is the best, but if there is time to dry out then a water resistant oil may be more suitable. It should be noted that the water resistant oil tends to give a longer protection to a gun on a wet day though is not so suitable for restoring anti-rust conditions when a gun is wet. Whatever oil is used in the bore the protective film is lost after the first shot has been fired. It is not uncommon to see shooters at the end of the day, sometimes in a damp atmosphere, sponge through the barrels, casually wipe over the gun with an oily rag and return it to the gun case; they deserve to have their guns ruined but are safeguarded by the properties of soluble oil.

They would soon be in for serious trouble if they used "North Country's" mixture of oil and paraffin, though I do not doubt his statement that it has given him satisfactory service because I am sure that he is one of those who carefully cleans and dries his guns after use. Finally, if a gun gets thoroughly wet and there is no gun oil available, as a temporary makeshift use lard or salad oil in preference to vaseline or automobile lubricants. Paraffin is an excellent solvent and will help to remove specks of rust, but it also leaves the surface of the metal in a suitable condition for further rusting, so if neat paraffin is used as a cleaner it is essential to wipe it off and replace with an anti-rust.

JOHN BAKER.
Horsforth, Leeds.

Only eleven inches high, he points, retrieves and delivers to hand. (See letter, "Terrier-Retriever.")

TERRIER-RETRIEVER

Sir,—The enclosed photograph of my dog may I think be of interest to readers if only for its uniqueness.

I chose him from a litter of "hunt terriers" and at eight years of age he stands at only eleven inches.

For the last six years he has been my gundog and will point and retrieve any game.

The photograph shows him bringing a partridge to hand.

GEO. GAUNT,
Peterborough.

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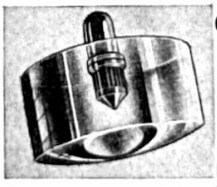

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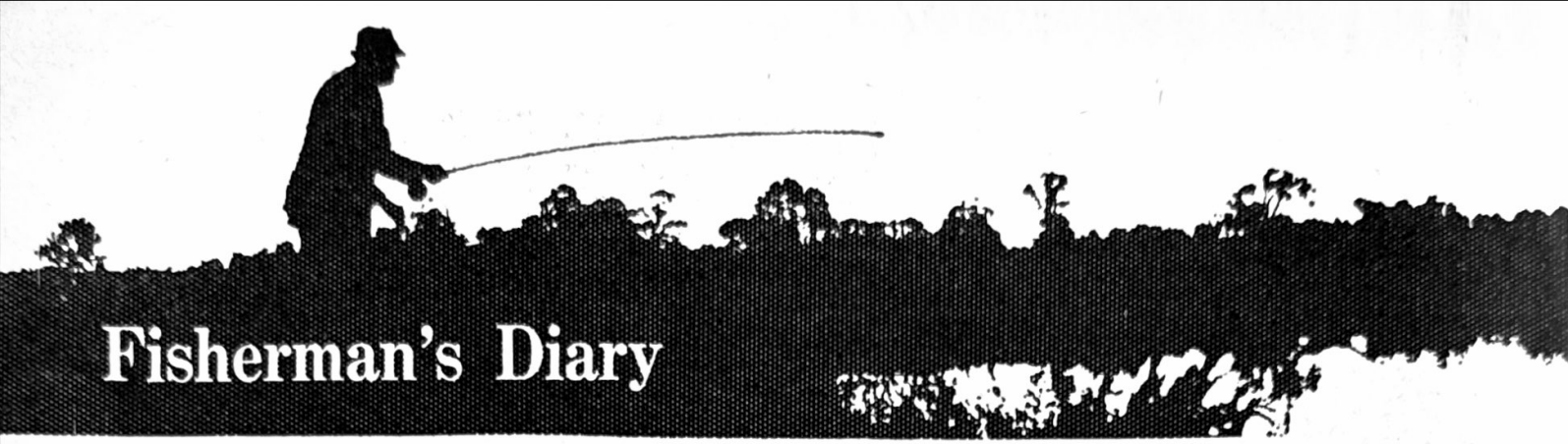


Fisherman's Diary

by Coridon

ONCE again there seems to be an eruption of that always active volcano, the national angling licence. Incidentally, it is often referred to as a universal licence, though much travel will have to be done before any licence issued by Whitehall will be available in distant parts of the universe.

I recognise that in some ways a rod licence covering all the waters in England and Wales would be a convenience. It would be a convenience to me, for I do most of my trout fishing in waters controlled by a River Board that demands separate licences for each of its main rivers—and I usually manage to fish in four or five other River Board areas during the course of a year.

The main point to consider, however, in my opinion, is not the convenience of anglers but the maintenance and improvement of fisheries, and I do not believe for a moment that central control of the funds produced by licences would do as much towards this object as the River Boards are doing at present.

There is much talk about two million anglers, but when one gets down to hard figures the total income from licences of all classes collected by the thirty-two River Boards of England and Wales for 1955 (the last year for which complete figures are available in the River Boards' Association Year Book) was £120,229. Other income raised the total receipts on account of fisheries to £142,673. Expenditure on the same account (*excluding* capital expenditure) exceeded income by some £22,000.

All this is chicken-feed in a nation's economy. It would still be a ludicrously small matter if a national licence cost £1 a year, and, from the little I know of the inner workings of bureaucracy, the sum collected would be hardly enough to meet the cost of collecting it.

The Road Fund contributed millions to the Exchequer, millions which were supposed to create a road system in Great Britain that would be the envy of the world. In spite of promises, the Government seized the money for other purposes, and we are left with the roads in their present state.

I once facily supported the argument that a central fishery fund would be raided in the same way. I am at least cured of that fear. Even a junior Treasury official would find angling licence funds too poor a picking to bother about.

River Boards have their faults, but there are local points of contact and the faults can in time be corrected. I think that on the whole they are doing a far better job for anglers than would be done by a Government department so remote that no local knowledge would be likely to influence its decisions.

Farmers and Pollution

Very slowly various organisations that have nothing to do with angling are coming into the fight against pollution. Speaking at Weston-super-Mare last month Mr. R. Erskine-Hill, National Secretary of the A.C.A., suggested that the National Farmers' Union should pull its weight in this cause.

"Why, for instance, doesn't the National Farmers' Union take up this matter more definitely with the Ministry of Agriculture?" he asked. "It affects them directly, for at the recent conference of the National Federation of Meat Traders' Associations a resolution was passed expressing concern at the 'rapid increase' in the number of cases of tape worm being found in cattle.

"One North Country delegate suggested that the principal cause of the disease was river pollution and that there was little wonder cattle became infected for our rivers were little better than open sewers."

Practical Proof

If all the damage caused by pollution could be calculated it would probably outweigh the cost of its prevention.

The loss to the national wealth in salmon alone is a considerable item. These fish no longer run in polluted waters or their run is much diminished. On waters where they have a chance of survival they bring in money.

On the River Tweed, for example, between February and September of this year the Berwick Salmon Fisheries Company netted £61,321 worth of salmon—an increase of £8,000 on the 1956 figure.

Fishy Names

In so rich a language as English there is a peculiar lack of fish names used in other than their correct sense.

An elderly lady of (I always imagine) large proportions, some wealth, and haughty mien, is sometimes disrespectfully referred to as an old trout. Land sharks are still with us, complete with sharp practices, but the name is obsolete except among the oldest generation.

The Italians, I understand, refer to their spivs and racketeers as *pescecani,* or dogfish, though the title seems to be reserved for big operators. A suitable expression, as whiting anglers will at this moment endorse.

Sprat Baits

Anyone who goes sea angling on odd occasions during the winter would be well advised to lay in a stock of sprats while they are plentiful and preserve them by laying them in salt between three or four thicknesses of newspaper.

It is not always easy to get bait, especially for the angler who lives inland and wants to spend what time he has in fishing rather than bait gathering.

At this time of the year sprats are excellent bait for whiting, and the fact that a flounder of nearly 4lb. and a John Dory of nearly 5lb. were caught on this bait recently shows that sprats are an attraction to varied species.

It is, of course, also the time to eat sprats! They seem to be regarded as somewhat low (like tripe and onions or jellied eels) by some dictators of the dining table, but they are a cheap, rich and savoury meal. If you are in danger of getting tired of them fried or grilled, try sousing them as you would herrings or mackerel. Superior cookery books will refer to the process as marinating.

Powered Trailing

I have just read a book on fishing in Scottish lochs which I missed when it was published some years ago. The author deprecated trailing (or trolling) as a method of angling generally, and regarded it almost as a criminal offence when used in conjunction with a craft powered by an outboard engine.

We were back to the arguments of nymph fishing on chalk-streams, threadlining on trout rivers, and using hempseed as bait for coarse fish. Rivers were to be denuded of fish by these methods — and trolling behind an outboard engine would empty the lochs.

Powered boats are now an integral part of fishing in the larger Scottish lochs, and though they are most often used to take fly-fishermen to the distant point from which they can drift and fish, they are also used for trailing a bait or lure. Nothing drastic happened to fish populations.

I am personally all in favour of an outboard engine to save the hard labour of rowing a heavy boat, but, once fishing, I prefer to trail behind oars. I do not know to what extent the noise or vibration of the engine offends the fish. I only know it offends me.

Worms Again!

Last week I wrote on worms. My attention has been drawn to John Gay's lines on the subject, presumably because they express the matter better than I did and because my correspondent differs from me over the efficacy of lobworms. I must point out that both he and Gay refer to trout, while I was writing of perch.

The lines occur in Gay's "Rural Sports," a long poem published fourteen years before he attained fame (and eventually a tomb in Westminster Abbey) with his "Beggar's Opera." The first twenty years or so of his life were spent in and around Barnstaple, and it was in North Devon that he gained his extensive knowledge of eighteenth-century field sports. The following sample of his verse could be entitled "Scouring Brandlings."

The worm that draws a long immoderate size
The trout abhors, and the rank morsel flies;
And if too small, the naked hook's in sight,
And fear forbids, while hunger does invite.
Those baits will best reward the fisher's pains,
Whose polished tails a shining yellow stains;
Cleanse them from filth, to give a tempting gloss.
Cherish the sullied reptile race with moss;
Amid the verdant bed they twine, they toil,
And from their bodies wipe their native soil.

Tailpiece

Seven million five-hundred thousand day tickets (or their equivalent for longer periods) were issued to anglers fishing in the Tennessee Valley reservoirs in 1947. By 1956 the figure had risen to 30,200,000. This year it was 32,400,000.

At this rate it should soon prove profitable to construct reservoirs in the United States solely for fishing.

Help Wanted

by Squeaker

LAST year, while listening to the wireless and waiting for "The Archers" to begin, we often listened to a programme aimed at the "younger generation." Very often this programme dealt with the manner in which young people are giving up a great deal of their spare time in order to develop proficiency in many different types of games, sports and other pastimes. Not only were there programmes about ball games and athletics, but pastimes such as underwater fishing, rock-climbing, weekend courses on music making and many other activities were dealt with.

About the same time one also heard a great deal about the way in which athletes were training for the Olympic Games and how special training systems had been worked out to ensure that they would be at the peak of their form at Melbourne. Practically the only sport which was not mentioned in this welter of training and enthusiasm was shooting, in spite of the fact that our game has such a wide following. While one must deplore the attitude of "the more the merrier" we can point with pride to the fact that about 1,400 *active* competitors attended the Smallbore Bisley this year. They came not to stand watching, nor to bet on their favourites, but to compete against each other. I have thought a great deal about this, but I cannot think of any other sport, game, or pastime which can exert such a pull upon its followers that 1,400 of them will assemble *in one place* to compete against each other Again over eight hundred active competitors shot at this year's Surrey Open Meeting.

In spite of our present fetish for training, and the enthusiasm for shooting which I have briefly outlined above I have not come across any straightforward, easily carried out method of training for rifle shooting. To give a simple example, say one is primarily interested in doing well at next year's Bisley meeting in July, how should one set out on a system of training so that one's shooting peak would be reached on the correct dates ?

Few Shooters Practise

Note I do not say *practice* but *training*. I have found that apparently very few target shooters practise. They are too busy with the normal run of competitions and matches to do so and in truth there is no better practice than match shooting which leads to a disciplining of nerves and temperament which is of great value in facing the many situations in which target shooters may find themselves. We have all met the case of the rising youngster who can pour them in while learning the trade, but ends up with cards in the low nineties when shooting in his first matches. Only match practice, and plenty of it can lead to an alleviation of this condition. Some never overcome this condition, but that is another story. What I want to know is, how can a hardened shooter train for any given event? Shooting strings of possibles in practice is not worth the effort and ammunition.

Obviously when considering training of almost any kind the two things which come to mind are physical fitness and stamina, but I am not very sure about the value of physical fitness. One is often told of cases in which shooters have risen almost from their deathbeds to carry off championships and almost every year we seem to meet people who are shooting against doctor's orders and doing very nicely on it too. However, I can see that physical fitness cannot be a disadvantage. An article which I read recently about training methods used on the Continent showed how far they go in this; diet is also said to be of great importance. (I usually train for the Roberts on beer, pork pie and pickled onions, which I gather is not quite right; now I know why I never win). But the sad fact is that most of us have to engage in the sordid business of earning our livings and cannot devote the time to training which apparently the "amateurs" of Iron Curtain countries are able to do. Another snag is that we shooters, as a whole, are a lazy lot; we even lie down to perform and the great things for which we strive are relaxation and a comfortable position.

Everyday Exercise

Bearing this in mind the training involved must be easily carried out and not take up too much time. This may not seem to be of much value, but it would be very much better than the amount of training which most of us do at present: nil. What I have in mind is something which can be done intensively on the range and to a lesser extent when away from the range. For instance, I have a method of wind doping practice which I think has been of value. While out walking in windy conditions I attempt to estimate the strength of the wind and as I walk, try to judge what would be the best instant to let away the shot. This type of "training" helps one to anticipate changes in the wind and the right time to shoot. On the range this training is put into practice and I am sure it valuable. Again, while I was in the Army one of our armourers tried to teach me to shoot a pistol and gave me a ruined .38 to carry about snapping the trigger in order to develop the muscles required. I never did learn to shoot the thing, but that is beside the point.

Stamina and Strength

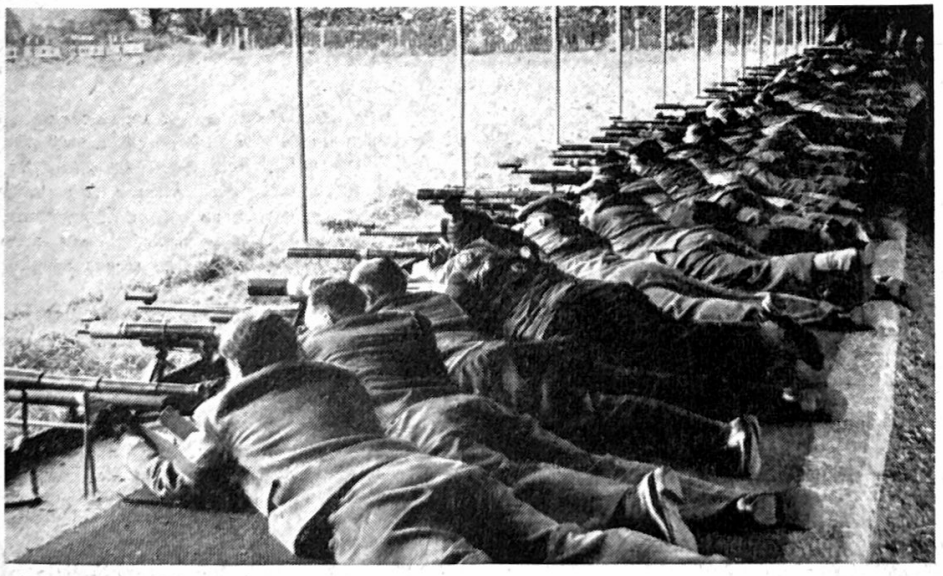
Provided one's physical shape is satisfactory (and I do not mean "vital statistics"), one's stamina should be considered at open meetings in order to take advantage of good conditions which may come along, one has often to shoot quite lengthy strings of cards. I remember having to shoot fourteen cards running at one county meeting, and at the Scottish meeting I usually find myself with all my hundreds to shoot on the last morning in a rather limited time. In order to develop the stamina required I think the Army type of strengthening exercises are of help and also the practice of frequent gun handling which I have seen mentioned in this journal should be employed to strengthen the required muscles. It is surprising how quickly one can become used to wielding a fourteen pound target rifle which at first sight appears to be a ton weight. One could also exercise to develop the muscles used, but I think it is better to pay attention to mechanical details such as position of handstop, length of sling, padding, fit of rifle and so forth which can relieve one of much of the strain of shooting.

I began by asking for some method of training and have above outlined some points which have come to my mind, but there are a couple of points which seem to be of greater importance; control of mind and body. All shooters appear to suffer from periods of mental aberration and do peculiar things. How many times have you known a shot was wrong but just *had* to let it go ? Again how often has a slight physical twinge pushed one out of the ten ring for you ?

One of my colleagues is very interested in athletics and spends most of his spare time in training and coaching our local talent. I put some queries to him on this matter of control. He asked me what it was that I wanted to achieve. After much thought I answered that I wanted to maintain a high degree of concentration of mind and absolute control of body for relatively short periods (seven minutes) but that these periods should follow one another for considerable periods of time. This was only a few days ago, but ever since I have been thinking over this reply which at first surprised me, but after a little investigation is beginning to make more and more sense.

He suggested that I take up the study of yoga. Film stars apparently (according to one of my Sunday newspapers) practise this in order to maintain their physical shape (yes, "vital statistics" this time), but I am also told that it is possible to attain very great control of mind and body by this system.

Perhaps some readers who have lived in the East may be able to offer some advice ? I know one reader who would be very interested.



Some of the 800 at the Surrey Open.

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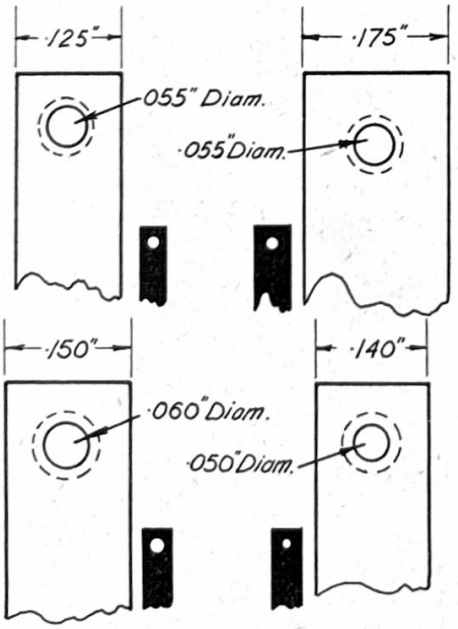
More Sights

by W. H. Fuller

THE pleasure in coupling up one's ideas and writings with those of another lies in the knowledge that at some time or the other he will come back at you, either to deny or confirm that which you have written. Harry Johnson, the veteran shooter mentioned in my last article on sights because he uses very small apertures and was the first person to put me on to the connection between iris diameters and fore-sight sizes fails to be any different from any of the others and has sent me a very informative letter and some samples of the type of sight element he uses up at the front end. He mentions some of the records he has made or broken, I am never certain which it should be, using these sights, but I am sure if he were less modest and I had the time to chase back through past records, we could between us fill a book. I do know that Harry was the first smallbore marksman to return a 400 in a Dewar match in the open at Bisley, although he only beat Ron Allen to it by a matter of minutes. He was also the first to shoot a 300 in the Home Countries International match in Scotland. His son Robin has also broken many records in the past using these tiny foresights and there is no doubt that he has similarly small irises, as has his father. Otherwise he could not get a clear picture through them.

Obliterating Test

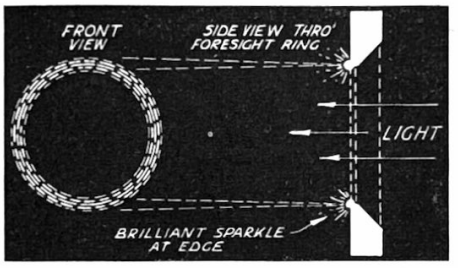
I have checked up the dimensions and the diameters of several of Harry's fore-sights and they are reproduced here. The main point to observe about these sights is that they are drilled blade sights and do not conform to our usual circular pattern. Trying these sights in my own rifle recently I found that I could not see a decimal aiming mark through any of the holes and in all cases except one, the .175in. wide blade, this aiming mark appeared on both sides of the blade or appeared to. The .175in. blade completely obliterated the Olympic aiming mark. I do not wish to infer that there is anything screwy about Harry and his foresights ; his successes are recorded and are there for everyone to see and are quite undeniable. All I would like to say is that I cannot see through or past them.



H.W.J.'s fore-sights. The large sketches give the width of the blades and the diameters of the aperatures. The small black figures are the actual size of the sights.

I would like to warn every smallbore shooter that one man's foresight can be another's lack of it, and I do not want anyone to rush out and buy new sets of blank foresights and drill them out to Harry's dimensions because I am quite sure that nine-hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand smallbore shooters could not see through them either. I would also like it to be understood that although my name appears at the top of this page it is there merely as a recorder and not as an advocate. I have also gone to the trouble of drilling out and filing down some ordinary P.H. foresight blanks, the holes to Harry's dimensions, the outside of the rings to what I think suits me best and have no better results with them. The only record I could have broken with them is the club's "lowest so far."

Now the peculiar thing about these sights, is that in spite of the fact that I cannot get a clear picture of the sights or the aiming-mark



The reason for the necessity for using a large fore-sight. This phenomenon applies to all kinds of sights and is responsible for the apparent shortening of a blade under bright sunlight and for the old and familiar adage— "up lights—up sights."

I can see a black spot surrounded by a white ring but I know that what I am looking at or rather seeing is a portion of the aiming-mark surrounded by an interference beam. I find that I can actually push the rifle over, but still the aiming appears to stay put inside the hole.

When a beam of light passes over or by the edge of a corner some of it is reflected and scattered and what one sees under these circumstances is the scattered light and not the white of the card surrounding the aiming-mark. This form of refraction can be reduced by blackening the fore-sight, using a correctly designed form of tubular sight, polaroid, in fact any device crude or elegant which can cut down the effects of the scatter. My illustration of the phenomenon is not exactly correct or to scale, but it is sufficiently so to describe the effects in this context. This means to say that because one sees the aiming-mark surrounded by white it does not necessarily prove that the aiming-mark is centrally within the ring. It is for this reason that the marksman is always advised to use a ring which is larger than may appear to be necessary. Practising aim-off to a much greater extent than the average marksman in my everyday shooting I am always very much aware of the need to keep the edge of the aiming-mark from getting too near to the edge of the fore-sight ring.

A Better Proposition

Refraction over the edges of fore-sight rings appears to be more troublesome indoors than on outdoor ranges, provided the extreme case of brilliant sunshine is not included. This is possibly due to the source of light on the indoor range being concentrated on the target rack. It is a far better proposition to illuminate the targets by the ordinary general range lighting. There is no need for the targets to be brilliantly lit, a low intensity all-round general illumination being far better. Lights shining directly into the eye must obviously be avoided but the general idea should be that the iris is not subjected to wide changes of intensity as one take one's eyes off the surroundings to concentrate through the sights. Personally I think there is a case for a slightly larger foresight being used indoors than outside and this is in accordance with the rough dimensional data I have given in a previous article. The iris will naturally and automatically enlarge itself under the comparative low intensity of general indoor lighting and a larger fore-sight should therefore be used.

I therefore suggest that for all intents and purposes the average marksmen should forget Harry's fore-sights but certainly not his performances. Because he has used them satisfactorily for many a year it does not mean to say that you or I could use them for a minute. I know I cannot.

In the Kitchen

by PENELOPE TURING

THE price of those delicious pâtés which figure in the Christmas food catalogues reminded me recently that very good game pâté can be made at home, and that if I wanted anything of this kind to add to the Christmas menu I must make it myself.

Game Pâté. Use a tender bird, bone it carefully and cut the meat into small, neat pieces. Wipe 1lb. of veal and cut it up roughly, removing all skin, then put this through a mincing machine with ½lb. of bacon and any extra trimmings of game. Mix the minced meats thoroughly, and put through the mincer again if it is not fine enough. Add to this 2 tablespoons of unsweetened biscuit crumbs, pepper, salt, and a little grated nutmeg. Moisten with 1 beaten egg and 1 glass of sherry, and mix well together. Take a straight-sided fireproof jar, taller than it is wide and with a lid (known as *terrine*) and line it with 4oz. of rasher bacon.

Put a layer of the mince mixture at the bottom, then a layer of game meat, and so on until the dish is full. Cover with rashers of bacon, then a layer of thinly sliced onion, thin slices of lemon and a bay leaf. Put on the lid and seal the join with flour and water paste (the lid must, of course, have a small hole in it). Bake in a good oven until the pieces of meat feel tender when tested with a skewer through the hole in the lid—about 1½ to 2 hours. Serve, cut in slices, when quite cold. Regular *terrines* can of course be kept for two or three months, but this means carefully evaporating all moisture and sealing the *terrine* inside its jar with a complete skin of melted lard. Personally I do not think it worthwhile, specially as I do not trust my skill in this line to ensure its keeping quality.

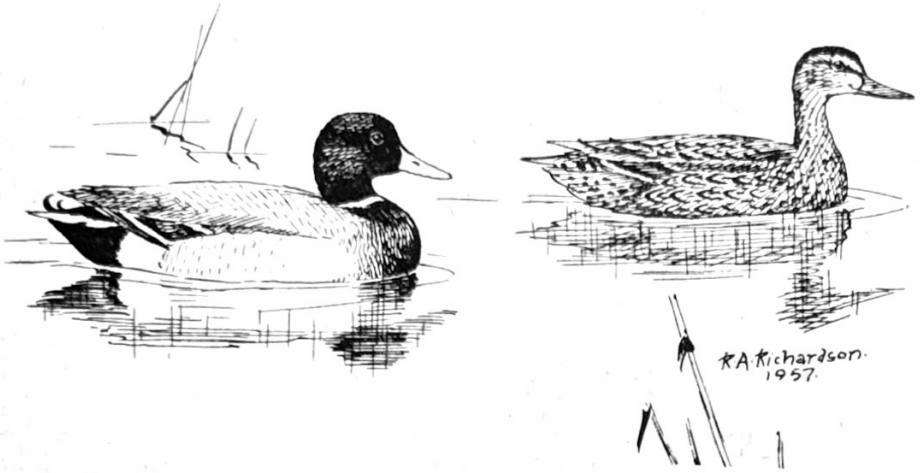
Devilled Game. Whatever the Christmas bird one nearly always has some left-overs to cook up. I like odd joints of game or poultry devilled, and the simplest method is to cover joints or slices with a generous layer of made mustard, with or without a little ground ginger, roll them in breadcrumbs and fry. There are few better breakfast dishes.

Clay Pigeon Shooting Fixtures

Dec. 14 : Bedford and District G.C., Elstow. Wappenshaw event.
Dec. 15 : Birmingham G.C., Brockhill Lane, Redditch. 10 a.m.
Dec. 21 : Childrey C.P.S.C. Wappenshaw Shoot.
Dec. 22 : Beverley and District G.C., Yorks. Members' Christmas Shoot. 1 p.m.
Dec. 26 : Bowland and District G.C., nr. Clitheroe, Lancs. Open Shoot. 12.30 p.m.
Dec. 26 : North Wales G.C., Rhosesmor. 100-bird Continental B 11 Trap Shoot. 10.30 a.m.
Dec. 26 : Alston Gun Club. President's Cup Shoot.
Jan. 5, 1958 : Bisley G.C. Club Shoot.

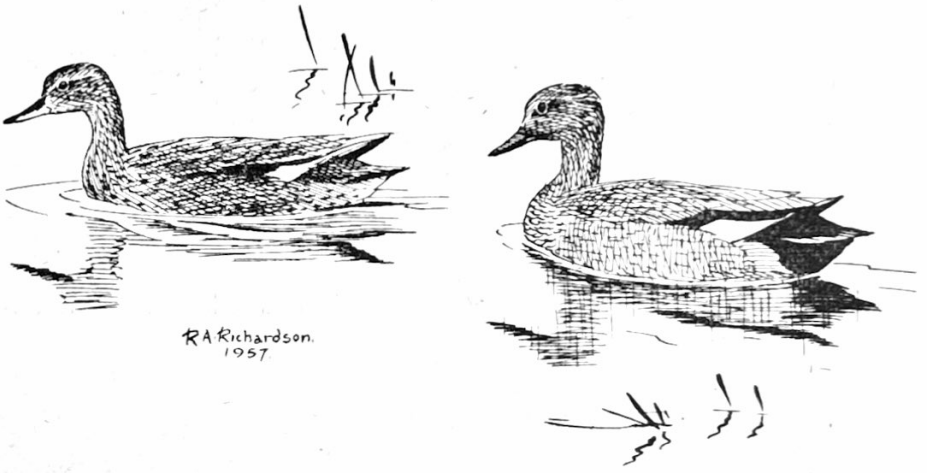
WILDFOWL IDENTIFICATION—II

For the benefit of young wildfowlers, tyros, and even more experienced gunners, we have decided to devote occasional pages to sketches, by that famous bird-artist Mr. R. A. Richardson, with captions by our old contributor "Sea-Pie," of our more common wildfowl. The first of these (issue November 29) was devoted to the geese—those on the shooting list only. Others now follow on duck which may legitimately be shot, and on the waders. Then we hope, for the sake of identification, to show those species of geese, duck and waders which are commonly met with on the shore, but which are on the list of birds protected by law.



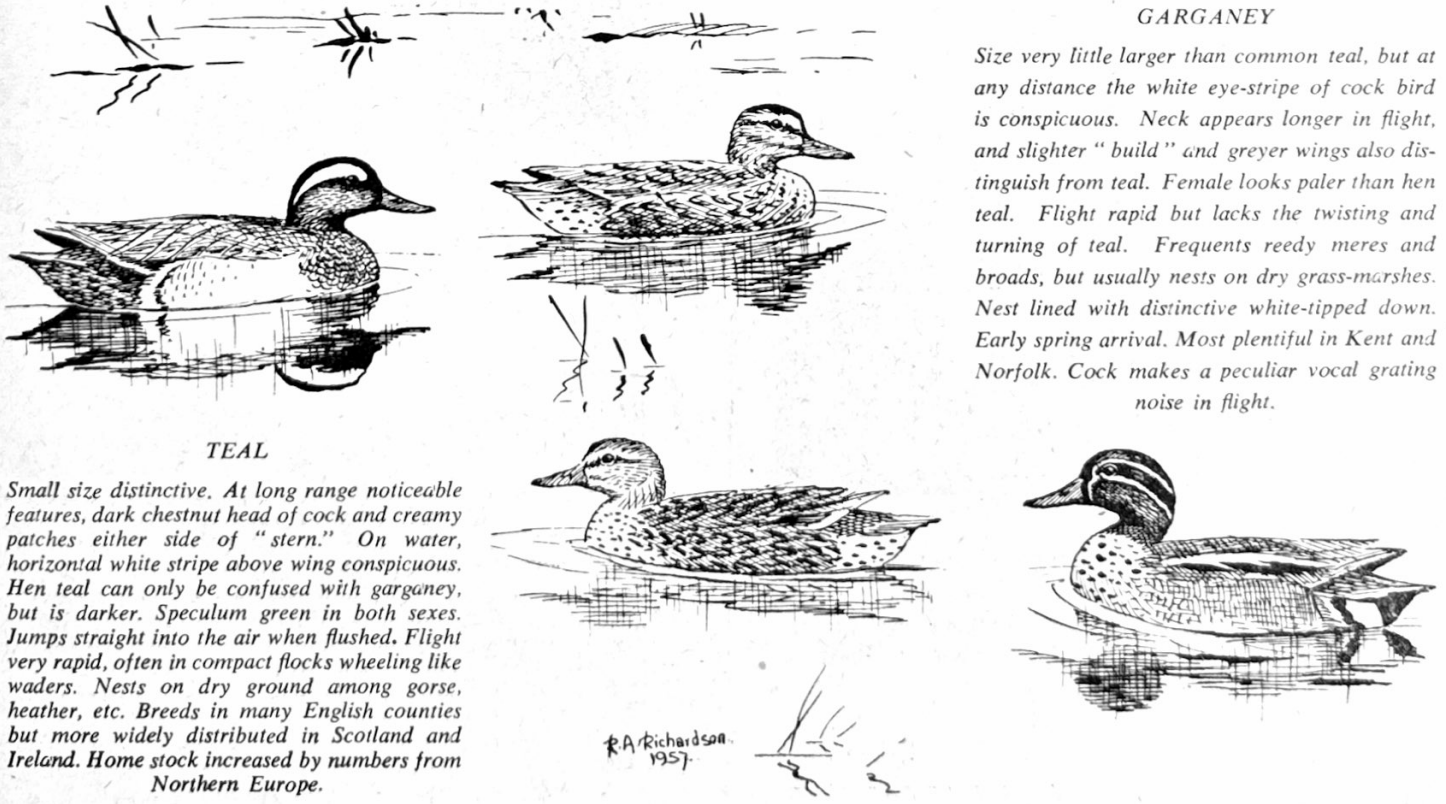
MALLARD

Drake easily distinguished by its green head and white collar. Both drake and brown-tinted duck have violet-purple wing-speculums edged white, and orange-red legs. Beak greenish yellow. Not only frequents large sheets of water, but also small tarns and ponds. Often feeds on open fields away from marshes. It rises straight off the water and the flight is rapid and distinctive. Coastal birds often rest in large flocks at sea by day. Visitors from Northern Europe join home-bred stock during late autumn.



GADWALL

Slightly smaller than mallard and rather more elegant in shape. White speculum is diagnostic (both sexes) in flight, black "stern" distinctive of male. Legs orange, bill dark grey. At a distance the drake appears a uniform brownish grey with black tail coverts, and duck like a shapely female mallard. Orange patch at side of her bill is a good characteristic. Chiefly frequents sluggish waters with rank vegetation. Not often found on salt water. Breeds numerously west Norfolk and Suffolk, and on Loch Leven, Scotland. Elsewhere local or sporadic.



GARGANEY

Size very little larger than common teal, but at any distance the white eye-stripe of cock bird is conspicuous. Neck appears longer in flight, and slighter "build" and greyer wings also distinguish from teal. Female looks paler than hen teal. Flight rapid but lacks the twisting and turning of teal. Frequents reedy meres and broads, but usually nests on dry grass-marshes. Nest lined with distinctive white-tipped down. Early spring arrival. Most plentiful in Kent and Norfolk. Cock makes a peculiar vocal grating noise in flight.

TEAL

Small size distinctive. At long range noticeable features, dark chestnut head of cock and creamy patches either side of "stern." On water, horizontal white stripe above wing conspicuous. Hen teal can only be confused with garganey, but is darker. Speculum green in both sexes. Jumps straight into the air when flushed. Flight very rapid, often in compact flocks wheeling like waders. Nests on dry ground among gorse, heather, etc. Breeds in many English counties but more widely distributed in Scotland and Ireland. Home stock increased by numbers from Northern Europe.

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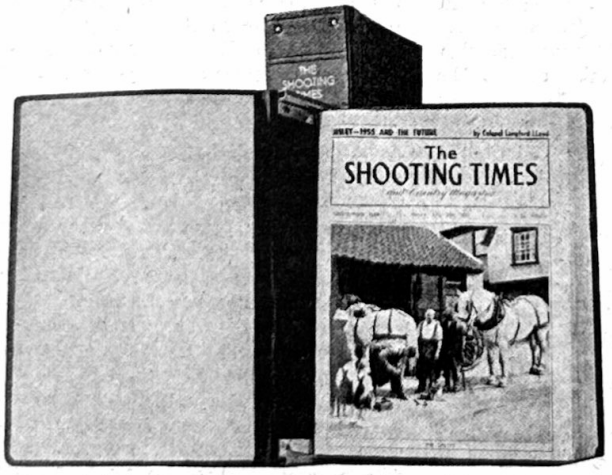

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Beoley Kennels, Redditch, Worcs.

THE last major retriever field trial of the season, prior to the championship stake, was that organised by the United Gundog Breeders Association on November 26, at Moseley Hall Farm, Fordhouses, near Wolverhampton — and what a unique experience it proved to be ! It gave me great pleasure to judge this open retriever stake, together with Capt. R. A. B. Orlebar and Mr. R. Howard, and served as a very happy introduction to the Midland area, where I am now living. Indeed, from first to last I was impressed by the hospitality, sportsmanship and general air of friendship which exists in this part of the world.

Why was the trial unique? In the first place, it took place within half a mile of industrial Wolverhampton, yet provided beautiful scenery and ample game. Secondly, and of perhaps even greater importance, the hospitality shown by our host, Mr. William Bibbey, to guns, officials, handlers and spectators can seldom, if ever, have been equalled. Not only did he provide *everyone* with a lavish lunch and liquid refreshment, but he laid on an excellent tea at the conclusion of the stake, and throughout the day, together with his guns, keeper and beaters, conducted affairs entirely for the trial and the dogs. Everyone worked with accord and in great spirit, the guns shot excellently, and the amount of work that Mrs. Bibbey must have put in behind the scenes makes me tremble to contemplate !

Nazeing Mick, winner of the K.C. puppy and non-winners' stake at Six Mile Bottom, retrieves to his owner/handler Mrs. R. Crawshay.

Good Weather and Dog Work

We were extremely fortunate with the weather, which was dry and fine, though cold, and scenting conditions were average to good throughout. The dog work was of a high order in general, although one or two competitors lacked either the control or the experience required for open stake standard. The day started with a duck shoot on the beautiful lake behind the house, the dogs being brought in after the shooting had ceased, when a very exacting water test on duck was given to all of them. Only one failed to face the water effectively, which spoiled a subsequent good general performance as regards gamefinding and style. Two woodland drives near the lake produced a mixed bag of pheasants and woodcock, which tested the dogs thoroughly in cover and reeds. After this, two areas of clover and grass were walked up, which gave the judges the opportunity of testing the dogs for steadiness, marking ability and general gamefinding. One hen pheasant foxed us all completely, falling at close range near a pylon apparently stone dead, but proving a strong runner which was never found. Several other birds were shot and retrieved in this field, and some gave the handlers an opportunity to demonstrate the ability of their dogs to be directed and handled.

After a most lavish lunch at the farm, eight dogs were still in the running, and two woodland drives in very attractive setting soon gave the judges enough game to work on. At this stage two dogs were running neck and neck for first place—Lord Rank's F.T.Ch. Strattonley Raven, and Mr. Frank Bell's Grouseadee. The judges put these two out, in the above order, after a very strong running pheasant in thick cover. Both hunted with great drive and perseverance, but Raven failed to find and had his eye wiped by Grouseadee, thus clinching the matter for us. Grouseadee is a real veteran, being seven and a half years old, but still goes with great energy and style, and showed his vast experience under differing circumstances every time he was called for. Requiring very little handling, and in complete accord with Frank Bell, I consider this labrador one of the best gamefinders in the country, particularly in thick cover. His performance on this occasion fully bears out my recent statement that we are wrong to consider our dogs "past" trials after their third season.

Little Separated the First Two

Raven is a really first-class labrador, too, and excels in open country, with great style, marking ability, perseverance and nose. He handles excellently and David Munro can place him very accurately when sighted, but this does not prevent the dog from using his initiative when out of view in cover. Only very little separated the first two. The winner of third prize was Mrs. Heywood Lonsdale's Shavington Brutus, a youngster which is under excellent control at all times and goes with pace and style in any cover, using his nose and responsive to his owner-handler's commands and signals. Much the same can be said for Mrs. Crawshay's Nazeing Soot (another veteran of five and a half years). Soot did not have the best of luck and, I thought, was inclined to be put off by his handler's agitation when seeking unmarked game. However, he brought game to hand in a workmanlike manner and gave a great display of steadiness under temptation. Certificates of merit were awarded to Mr. H. Ashman's labrador Brysia Blackie, a promising youngster in its first season which with more experience should go a long way; Col. Unwin's veteran (8 years old) Eastwalton Pimpernel, giving a display of style and drive under all circumstances, but seemed at times on the verge of unsteadiness and made her handler anxious at drives; Mrs. P. Eccles golden retriever Haulston Yenston Brock, handled by G. Orritt, a small, stylish dog with terriffic pace for his eight years, but inclined to hunt by sight and over-run his nose. Special for the best marker went to Mrs. Venn's Coriscan Conquest.

This happy day concluded with a lavish tea and speeches of thanks to our host and hostess and the guns, keeper and beaters, all of whom combined to make the trial a great success. We all hope that Mr. Bibbey enjoyed the day as much as everyone else did, and that we have found in him another generous donor of ground for future trials. The fact that so much game and beautiful country can be found within a short distance of heavy industry impressed us all, and the B.B.C. sent along a recording car together with Midlands talk producer Paul Humphries and Phil Drabble, the well-known author, broadcaster and naturalist, who introduces the programme "In the Country" for the Midland Home Service. A recording was made for this programme on the subject of field trial, Mr. Drabble interviewing Mrs. Crawshay, Mr. Frank Bell and myself, which went out on Tuesday, December 3. The United Gundog Breeders' Association is indeed fortunate in having such a go-ahead secretary as Mr. F. Blakeley, and a committee which pull together and organise trials of this calibre.

* * *

The letter from reader C. A. Prior in issue November 22 re-opens the disputed subject of the wildfowler's dog, and asks for my views on encouraging dogs to follow their own instincts whilst reserving the right to thwart them to order. This, surely, is exactly what we are doing all the time when training a gundog. The wonder is that dogs ever become as good as they do in view of the constant thwarting of their natural instincts ! We start by thwarting a puppy from doing just as it pleases when we teach it obedience, then proceed to thwart its natural instinct to carry something off and play with or chew it when we teach it retrieving. We encourage a spaniel or other questing dog to hunt and find game, almost immediately clamp down and thwart its natural instinct to chase whatever it has flushed. Indeed, training is one long "thwart" from beginning to end.

"Controlled running-in," as it has been termed, is what I advocate for the average wildfowler's dog but, as I have stressed many times, any dog should be trained to suit its owner's particular tastes and requirements. Under certain circumstances you will find a

runner-in very useful—at other times it will be a confounded nuisance. If, therefore, you are clever enough or fortunate enough to be able to train your dog to run-in only when it is desirable, you are achieving a very great feat of which you can be justly proud. Few men have sufficient time or shooting—to say nothing of a suitable pupil—to accomplish this, and most of us fall by the wayside and end up either with a dead steady dog which must be given the command to go in to retrieve, or a wild one which cannot be prevented from so doing.

The whole art of gundog training lies, as I have stressed so many times, in knowing where to stop, and this applies in particular to the "thwarting" business. Equally important is knowing your pupil, and I should say that the best trainers are those who can size up the temperament of a particular puppy and apply methods in its training which will take this into account. For instance, you can have two spaniel puppies, little brothers, one of which will prove a natural hunter and require steadying to flush almost from the word "go," whilst the other, if repressed too quickly, will lose interest and may become an indifferent quester or, worse still, a non-quester. If you put the brakes on a sensitive puppy too early you will be making hard work for yourself, whereas if you fail to "get on top of" a pup of different temperament you may well find that it never becomes truly steady.

One Puppy's Meat . . .

This one example is true of all breeds of dog and applies to practically every item in the training curriculum. What will do for one puppy very well may easily prove "bad medicine" for another, even one of identical breeding and age, and more dogs are ruined by failure to take temperament into account than by any other single cause. We can read books which tell us all about dog training, but the best of these can only teach us the rudiments, and none can hope to deal with all the situations which may arise during training. It is quite easy for me to tell a man *roughly* how he should proceed with a puppy of unknown temperament, but unless he applies psychology and common sense to his methods he will never succeed. Even trainers of the greatest experience make mistakes from time to time—otherwise there would be no failures admitted by the professional—but I do believe that the owner-trainer of a single puppy can quite easily learn to respect his pupil's temperament and, indeed, he is better placed to do so than most professional trainers who cannot, naturally, give each pupil the time and individual attention as can the owner of a single dog.

Experience Gained Through Errors

Most of us gain our experience the hard way—by making mistakes—and the same can be said for most of our unfortunate canine pupils. However, men of the calibre of Joe Greatorex or John Kent, with years of practical experience behind them, can "size up" a dog after very short aquaintance, and know just how far they can go as regards "thwarting" their pupils. All animal training is, up to a point, based on utilising the natural instincts of the pupil, and guiding these into the desired channels. Hence the young retriever or spaniel puppy, picking up a bone and carrying it back to the nest, can be intercepted and made to give up its prize to you which, if repeated a few times will instil the willing delivery which we all seek. This is about the best example I can think of to illustrate the thwarting of a natural instinct to meet our own ends.

* * *

The Kennel Club held a puppy and non-winners' stake for retrievers at Six Mile Bottom, near Newmarket, on November 19, when the judges were Miss E. A. Neale, Major K. J. Malcolm, Messrs. D. F. Cock and R. J. Baldwin.

Awards: 1, Mrs. R. Crawshay's labrador Nazeing Mick; 2, Mr. F. George's labrador Harpersbrook Trust (K. Chudley); 3, Mr. V. Routledge's labrador Hallingbury Widgeon; reserve, Lord Rank's Scotney Gift (A. K. Manners). A certificate was awarded to Mr. O. V. Watney's Cornbury Beetle (A. C. White Robinson).

* * *

The Southern and Western Counties Field Trial Society held a puppy and no-winners' stake at Chilbolton Down, Stockbridge, on November 25, with Capt. W. A. Fellowes, Messrs. H. A. Saunders, R. E. Leach and K. Chudley judging.

Awards: 1, Mr. C. A. Vandervell's labrador Strattonley Tim (R. Hill); 2, Lord Rank's Scotney Gift (A. K. Manners); 3, Col. F. Bucher's labrador Madcap Moya; reserve, Major J. G. Murland's Rhet. Five certificates were awarded.

Messrs. R. G. Baldwin, D. F. Cock, Miss E. A. Neale and Major K. J. Malcolm who judged at Six Mile Bottom.

Pook's Disease

by Taproot

IN the still November air the column of smoke rose vertically, towering above the oakwoods, curving slightly at last when a breath of wind from the north-east touched it at a high altitude. Its origin was invisible, but only too guessable. All through a perfect autumn afternoon my eyes were drawn again and again to its dire message. After dark the picture changed. Then one could see a winking bar of fire with shadows moving beside it—whether of workmen forking unconsumed heads and hooves into the heart of the furnace, or whether the swirling base of the now unseen column, it was impossible to say.

It is over thirty years since the last outbreak of foot and mouth struck this district. So long a stretch of immunity had made most of us feel that this scourge one read about in the papers simply couldn't happen to us. Even so, the majority were insured. One friend of mine had paid a premium of £3 odd annually for over twenty years against a lump sum indemnity of £500. He had often grudged the payments. Now with the plague almost at his gate he felt they had been well worth while.

The majority of farmers whose herds are compulsorily slaughtered are compensated on a fairly generous scale by the Ministry. Normally the livestock owner employs a local auctioneer to value his animals at current market prices, and the Ministry usually accept his figures with little question. One or two inflated claims have produced a backlash from the Inland Revenue: "Why have the Ministry paid you £80 apiece for cows valued on your books at £50. There's been a profit here and we must assess you accordingly."

The owner of a valuable pedigree herd or the man who has built up a fine commercial herd by careful breeding and culling does not come off so well. He may lose the result of half a lifetime's work.

The worst form of loss, the one that hits all types of farmer impartially, and for which there is no compensation other than by insurance, is the loss of revenue. I use the word "revenue" advisedly for, if only profit were concerned while the farm were void of all livestock for the minimum six weeks period, there might not be much to worry about. Unfortunately, the expenses on a stockless dairy farm continue unabated, except for cake bills. The labour bill goes on. One cannot stand off stockmen as if they were coalminers. Rent, rates, lighting, insurance, all the other overheads keep ticking away. Even unfed fodder crops, especially marrow-stem kale, may be wasted.

Consignments of Argentine meat have been responsible for half the primary outbreaks reported in Great Britain this autumn, and farmers are feeling bitter against a policy of "importing disease." Our local outbreak, however, was of undiscovered origin. Birds, probably starlings, are blamed by the Ministry.

The big question now agitating the parish with its buckets of disinfectant and "Keep Out" notices, is how often a primary outbreak may lead to secondaries. The milk lorry that served the stricken farm made many other local calls on its daily round. It called here for instance two stops before the danger zone. Its potentialities as a carrier are alarming.

Old Tom, our local pig-cutter, adds this footnote. "When I were a boy there weren't no slaughter policy. We called it Pook's disease then. We drenched 'em with linseed oil and dressed their feet with Stockholm tar. In a week or two most got over it."

CORDWOOD

by L. R. James

THE best and cheapest fuel for the countryman is timber, and with a cord or two of wood in the shed he can be independent of the coal merchant. Cordwood is the first stage of timber intended for fuel, and a "cord" is a typically English piece of arbitrary mensuration that varies from place to place or with the type of wood being felled. In my own county of Surrey, it is an oblong pile 8ft. by 4ft. by 4ft., or 128 cubic feet over all.

Foresters give various explanations of the origin of the measure, but most agree that it was the average load for a horse-drawn cart. The cord is probably a relic of charcoal burning, and the unit of four feet happens to be the length of the handle of a felling axe. Oak is always cut into four-foot lengths, but coppice wood is often stacked in six-foot pieces, and a cord of such material is 6ft. by 4ft. by 4ft, or 144 cubic feet. Four feet is reckoned to be the shortest length of wood that can be cut with an axe without undue waste.

When timber is cut for the sawmill, the fellers are entitled, by tradition, to the "lop and top." The thin twigs and rubbish is burnt forthwith, and the larger side branches make the cordwood for fuel. Cordwood is always sold "ex woodland," and prospective buyers like to make a bargain as soon as cutting is started as woodmen will usually take a low price to get an early clearance of their contract. A cord of good fuel should contain no rotten pieces, and the spaces between large logs should be filled with thinner ones so that the heap is as compact as possible. Even a tightly packed cord contains nearly 50 per cent of air spaces or only 70 actual cubic feet of fuel. The price of a cord of sound timber varies from £2 for a stack alongside a hard road to a few shillings for one where extraction is difficult and expensive. An average cord costs about £2 delivered home, and is a very good bargain as fuel prices go today. There are about 25cwt. of dry logs in a cord, and although wood has only half the calorific value of coal, it is much cheaper than the latter at £6 per ton.

Newly felled timber has a water content of up to 80 per cent, and although many woods *will* burn when green, it is better to allow the logs to season under cover for six months or more. Wet logs waste much of their effective heat in evaporating the surplus water and give unattractive fires, but they are handy for keeping a fire going overnight.

In large open hearths, cordwood can be burnt in four-foot lengths. This saves much labour, and gives truly baronial fires, but most of us have to convert it to suit ordinary fireplaces. The easiest (and dullest) way to convert a cord of wood into useful logs is to borrow a tractor and circular saw — two men can cut up a cord in about an hour and a half or in two hours if very small logs are imperative. The lover of wood fires, however, will prefer to cut his own logs and provide himself with a delightful and never-ending task for wet days and very cold weather. Given good tools, there is much pleasure in working with wood, and while it is hard work it is also a labour of love—like good digging.

Tools for the Job

The tools for rough timber are the bowsaw and the axe, and the muscular type will also use the beetle and wedges. A carpenter's saw is useless, and a cross-cut saw needs somebody at the other end! The modern Swedish bowsaw, with one man working leisurely, will cut more logs than two men using a cross-cut saw —and make less sawdust. The 30in. blade is the most useful size, with perhaps a 36in. for very large logs and a 24in. as well if the lady of the house wants to assist. The writer insists on a Swedish blade. Britain can make most things, but has not yet learnt to make a bowsaw that can treat the hardest wood with contempt. Almost as important as the saw is the saw-horse to hold the log rigid while the cutting is taking place. The metal ones *look* very efficient, but they are deadly to saw teeth. It is very easy to make a saw-horse from the first load of cordwood. There are two schools of thought as to whether it is better to cross-cut first and split after or the other way round. If the logs are too heavy to lift on the horse, splitting must come first to make pieces light enough to handle.

Suitable Fuels

Here is a list of the commoner British timbers —very roughly in the order of their excellence as fuels:

Ash is far and away the best burning wood. When dry it is as good or better than coal, and it will give a cheerful fire if burnt on the day the tree is felled. Ash cuts and splits easily, and makes excellent kindling wood. It is not always readily obtainable as foresters very naturally prefer to keep it for their own use rather than to sell it.

Holly is almost as good as ash. It makes a very hot fire when seasoned and will also burn well when green. There is little demand for holly at the saw mill, and it may, therefore, come in very thick logs that are awkward to handle. It is scarce in some areas.

Apple and pear, all the Pyrus and Prunis family, hawthorn, mountain ash, and cherry can be lumped together for fuel purposes. They are all hard dense woods that give hot and lasting fires when dry, and each has its own delightful perfume in the smoke. Fruit tree timber is often available in quantity when an old orchard is grubbed up, but is seldom found in cordwood. Hawthorn and blackthorn are awkward to handle and are tough on saw blades, but both make fine fires. Cherry is good, but rots quickly unless kept dry.

Beech is another fine fuel that is common on the chalk but may be rare elsewhere. It makes a hot and smokeless fire that lasts a long time.

Oak is the commonest firewood, and the one most likely to be offered as cordwood. Park and hedgerow oaks are more cordwood than useful timber. Oak cuts and splits easily when green, but the many knots and forks are hard to cleave until the knack is learnt. Oak burns well when stacked in the dry for 6 months or more.

Birch is so common in some districts that it is virtually a woodland weed. Birch burns well, but makes a hot but short-lasting fire. It will burn green, but is better when kept a few months. If stored in the open, birch will rot in six months and be about as useful as wet blotting paper for fuel. It is very easy to cut, and cleaves nicely into quick lighting kindling.

Yew makes a really excellent fuel, but is so difficult to saw and tough to cleave that the beginner may be discouraged. It is mainly found on the chalk. Yew will remain sound for decades when stacked outdoors, and straight pieces are best retained for fence posts. Yew makes hot and long-lasting fires for the muscular connoisseur.

Pine, larch, and all the other so called softwoods are not so good as fuel as might be supposed. They all contain a large amount of water, and need much drying before they burn well. Most of them are fuels that throw dangerous sparks, and larch is a very bad offender in this respect. The knotty side branches of Scots pine burn very well, but mind the carpet.

Elm is a second-rate timber for burning, and must be kept for two years before it is any good. Most elm today is diseased, and has a vile smell when sawn. It is hard on the saw, and difficult to split. Green elm will put the fire out.

Woods to Avoid

Timbers to avoid as fuel are chestnut (both sweet and horse), poplar, willow and alder. Chestnut is nearly fireproof when green, and the others contain so much water that they are virtually unburnable unless dried in an oven, but these poor fuels can be used with other better woods.

Wood burns best on a large flat with a thick bed of ash underneath to conserve the heat and dry out the fresh logs. It need never go out all winter. Such a fire will burn large and green logs and will only need stoking once or twice a day. A "two-man log" may even burn for several days. The ash may be cleared once a month, but, within reason, the more ash the better. Smaller raised fireplaces lose the advantage of a bed of hot ash, and need much more attention if a good fire is to be kept. Wood fuel should always be used in generous quantities. It is said that:

ONE log can't burn,
TWO logs won't burn,
THREE logs may burn,
FOUR logs will burn,
FIVE logs make a fire.

And the wood should be cut or split according to the size of the fireplace. Well-dried logs should be used in small fireplaces in cold weather, and wet or green wood reserved for keeping the fire going overnight. The fire will stay alight at a low tempo if a shovelful of ashes are sprinkled on the last thing at night. A roaring log fire needs a lot of oxygen, and will draw in air from under the doors and perhaps chill the ankles in the process. Uncomfortable draughts can be avoided by drilling three or four half-inch holes in the floorboards in front of the fireplace. This will draw in air from outdoors and leave the rest of the room completely free from chilling draughts.

The wood ash is a valuable garden fertiliser, rich in potash. Keep it for potatoes and soft fruit.

No Increase in Cartridge Rebate

In the House of Commons recently, Mr. J. B. Godber, Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Minister of Agriculture, said the Minister did not feel justified in increasing the Cartridge Rebate Scheme from 24s. per 100 in view of the fact that the cheapest cartridges now cost £2 15s. 9d. per 100.

Mr. Godber was also asked by Mr. Godman Irvine if he was aware that on the form on which the application was made for rebate it was stated that the payment was made as to 50 per cent subject to a maximum of 24s. In the circumstances, and in view of the previous answer, would he not consider amending the form.

In his reply Mr. Godber said it might be illogical to say that there was a rebate of 50 per cent when, in fact, they were not giving quite 50 per cent; but he did not think it would be right to increase the rebate.

Mr. H. Hynd asked if the Minister would not consider withdrawing this concession altogether? "Why should the taxpayer pay for people's sport?"

Mr. Godber replied that in the main, this scheme served a very useful purpose. Woodpigeon were a very great menace and many people who shot these birds would not do so if they did not have the advantage of the rebate.

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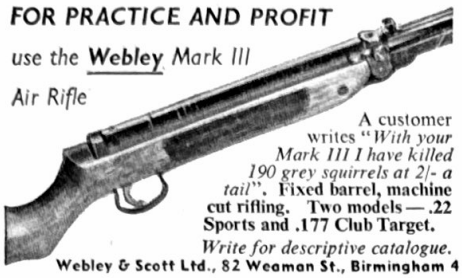

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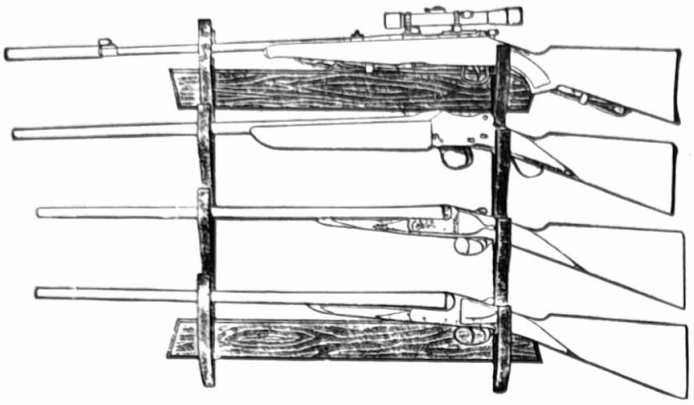

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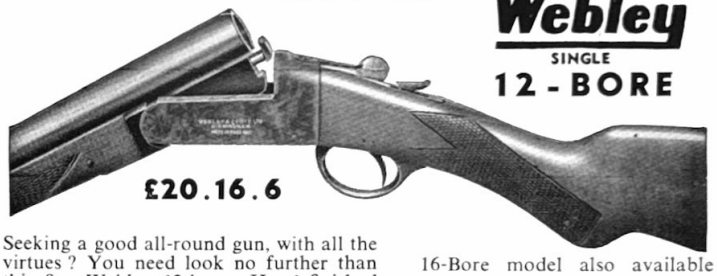

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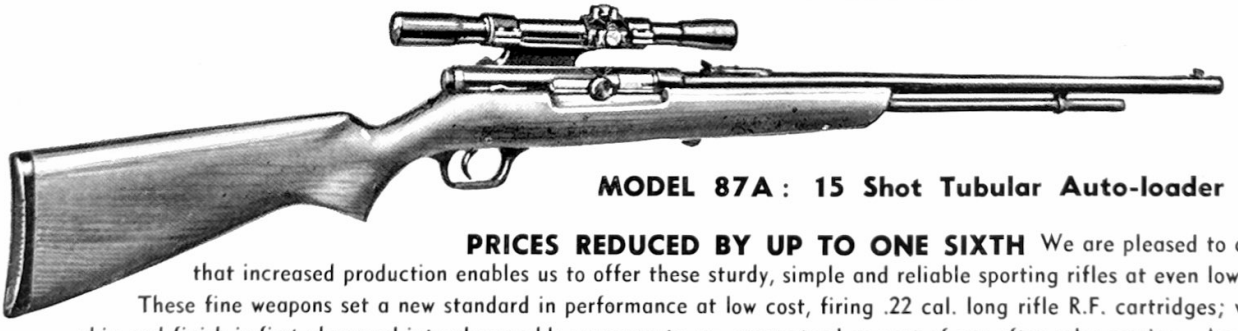

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